

Learning by Leading: Student-Driven Conference Planning as Pedagogy for Leadership Development

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Abstract: *Leadership development is integral to the social work profession and competencies, yet classroom teaching of leadership skills remains elusive. The purpose of this article is to describe a promising approach to developing student leadership skills through a 1-credit seminar using project-based learning and student-faculty collaboration. In two consecutive years, students and faculty collaborated to design and lead a student-driven social work health policy and practice conference attended by over 220 learners. Student planners co-led all aspects of the project including selecting themes, inviting speakers, marketing, leading workshops, moderating panels, emceeding, and evaluation. A novel, fast-paced “360 Roundtable” event engaged over 30 students in leading multi-faceted mini-workshops. The planning team evaluated the impact of their efforts by collecting post-conference feedback in which attendees self-reported high satisfaction. Conference planning and implementation served as a pedagogical context for students to demonstrate learning by leading. They successfully solicited the expertise of policymakers, recruited peers, collaboratively handled conference logistics, and led confidently in public venues. Overall, this collaborative pedagogical approach to conference planning illustrates how engaging students as leaders and co-designers in their own education can produce impactful real-world outcomes and build student leadership capacity. We describe each stage of project implementation and discuss its rationale to enable other educators to adapt and modify this promising leadership teaching strategy for their own contexts.*

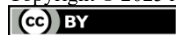
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Leadership is the ability to achieve a goal by influencing and recruiting participation and help from others (Prentice, 2004). Leadership development and policy-practice integration are integral to the social work profession and educational competencies (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2022; Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2022), yet effectively teaching these skills in the classroom setting remains elusive (Peters, 2018); and teaching leadership theory does not necessarily foster practical skill development (Bachkirova & Jackson, 2024). Further, not all social work students are ready or want to become leaders (Rank & Hutchison, 2000). Thus, approaches to teaching leadership that offer supported opportunities to lead, overcome self-doubt, and build confidence and desire to lead naturalistically among social work students would be advantageous, and would warrant exploration.

Two promising pedagogical approaches for leadership development are noteworthy. The first is project-based learning, which engages small groups of students in a process of learning-by-doing to accomplish meaningful goals and create real-world products (Chen

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& Yang, 2019; Guo et al., 2020). Rooted in the social constructivist theory of Vygotsky, project-based learning conceptualizes knowledge as co-constructed through interaction, collaboration, and engagement with complex tasks, allowing learners to extend their understanding within the zone of proximal development (Lai, 2023; Moghadam, 2025). Project-based learning has been used at all grade levels, including higher education, and has been shown to improve affective, cognitive, and skill-based learning outcomes (Guo et al., 2020) and academic achievement (Chen & Yang, 2019). In a study among more than 250 university students, project-based learning was identified as one of six teaching methods that students report contribute to development of their critical thinking skills (Campo et al., 2023). Using this approach, projects could be developed that teach leadership skills by including an outward, public-facing leadership component such as planning a conference for peers, faculty, and campus, thus learning by leading.

The second promising pedagogical approach that may help students overcome initial self-doubt as novice leaders is student-faculty collaboration (Bovill, 2020; Bovill et al., 2016; Chan & Stacey, 2022), which also builds on Vygotsky's relational model of learning (Moghadam, 2025; Taylor & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). This collaborative approach involves students as co-developers and co-designers in their own education in which students, faculty, and others function as a community of life-long learners (Bovill, 2020), sharing power and decision-making (DelSesto et al., 2025). This approach to teaching and learning exemplifies social work values such as the importance of human relationships and the dignity and worth of each person (NASW, 2021). Sometimes referred to as student-staff partnerships, these are endeavors in which students, faculty, and staff work collaboratively as a team, with attention to shared decision-making and distributed leadership (Bovill et al., 2016; Chan & Stacey, 2022; Martens et al., 2019). This collaborative approach is increasingly common in higher education to enlist students as co-creators and co-designers of teaching and learning experiences (Bovill et al., 2016). Such partnerships have been used to redesign courses, conduct research, and update the curriculum (Jarvis et al., 2013; Lai, 2023; Mihans et al., 2008).

In this teaching paper we describe a collaborative approach to leadership development through a 1-credit seminar to strengthen student leadership capacity and confidence through conference planning, thus fostering learning-by-doing and learning-by-leading. A small team of social work students (BSW, MSW, and doctoral levels) and a faculty sponsor collaborated to plan and lead two school-wide conferences on health policy-practice topics. To facilitate transparency and replicability of this approach, we describe the process of designing, implementing, and assessing the impact of a public-facing conference, and discuss its pedagogical features and rationale.

Project Description

The structure we used for teaching and learning about leadership was a seminar incorporating project-based learning (Chen & Yang, 2019; Guo et al., 2020) and student-faculty collaboration (Bovill, 2020; Bovill et al., 2016) to create a real-world product – a professional conference - that could influence and educate a community of student peers, faculty, and staff. A six-to-eight person planning team each year included four social work

students from the BSW and MSW programs enrolled in the seminar, one or two graduate students (volunteers or graduate hourly assistants), a faculty member, and support from other faculty/staff as needed. While not completely non-hierarchical (e.g., the faculty member developed the syllabus and assigned grades for course credit), the seminar design distributed leadership and peer mentoring responsibility among all participants on the team. The seminar was one part of the Healthcare Education and Leadership Scholars (HEALS) training program, a collaborative initiative of NASW and CSWE 2015-2021 (NASW, 2015).

In two consecutive spring semesters beginning in 2018, our school offered a 1-credit leadership seminar that incorporated planning a conference as a project-based learning activity with the goal of enhancing student leadership capacity in health practice and policy integration. The student-faculty team planned, organized, and hosted two school-wide, student-driven conferences addressing policy and practice implications relevant to current health issues. Students collaborated with the faculty sponsor to choose the topic of interest for each conference; the final conference topics selected were (a) *Social Work Policy and Practice Responses to the Opioid Crisis: Opportunities for Advocacy, Intervention, and Community Empowerment*; and (b) *Young Adult Health and Mental Health Across the Lifespan: Social Work Policy and Practice*. See Table 1 for the sample conference topics. A third annual conference was planned that addressed recent changes in cannabis use laws in Illinois, but it was cancelled abruptly due to COVID-19 a week before the conference; and so, instead the team converted the project into a journal article (Parker et al., 2021). Below we describe how we used conference planning as a method of student leadership training, followed by outcomes and implications for teaching and learning in social work education.

Table 1. *Sample 360 Roundtable Topics for Conferences in Year One and Two*

Opioid Crisis Conference	Young Adult Health Conference
The Role Race Plays in the Opioid Crisis	Making the Most of Annual Wellness Visits
Opioid Use and PTSD	Sleep Hygiene
Discussing Substance Use with Patients	Suicide Intervention
First Responders and the Opioid Epidemic	Teen Vaping and Smoking Cessation
Opioid Use among Adolescents	Yoga, Positive Affirmation, and Self-Care
Stigma Reduction	Sexual Health and Safety for Young Adults
Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)	ACEs and Resilience for Young Adults

Note. PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. ACEs, Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Conference Planning Structure and Process

The seminar extended over two semesters of the academic year to allow time for team building, planning, and capacity building prior to the implementation phase. During the fall semester, students explored conference topics by taking turns facilitating a biweekly journal club and exploring social work policy-practice issues, values, and possible conference topics. In the spring semester, seminar time focused on conference planning and implementation.

Conference Topic Selection

Together, students and faculty deliberated on the conference theme: they compiled a list of possible topics, discussed the merits of each topic, identified potential speakers, and selected the theme. The goal was to select a theme that had healthcare practice and policy implications for social workers, was timely and important, and that was of strong interest among their peers.

Conference Purpose and Objectives

Once the topic was selected, the team identified the goals and learning objectives for the conference audience of students and faculty. A key aim of the project was to build student leadership skills and opportunities, so students took on roles such as contacting and introducing speakers, planning and leading mini workshops, moderating the panel, and performing host of ceremony duties such as leading the welcome and closing activity.

Meeting Frequency and Roles

In the fall semester, the team met bi-weekly for seminar. In the spring, the team met weekly for planning meetings of about 50 minutes. Each team member took ownership of specific tasks and reported back each week, such as contacting possible speakers, booking the venue, creating flyers to advertise the event, and creating the registration form. A paid graduate student on the team served as a coordinator.

Technology and Planning Tools

The seminar conference planning team used free online tools to assist with conference planning. To stay organized, the team used a shared planning Google Sheet to track and monitor tasks that could be updated in real time during meetings. Tabs were created to track speakers with their contact information, venue logistics, volunteers, the conference schedule, budget, and workshop topics of interest for each conference event. The spreadsheet was projected on a screen and updated at each meeting.

Marketing and Logistics

Students used a free online tool to create printed and electronic flyers to promote the event and used Google Forms for conference registration. The registration form also asked registrants about their interest in volunteering at the event, including leading mini workshops. Flyers were distributed by email to students and faculty, posted on school social media, and displayed throughout the school. Students and faculty were encouraged to share widely among their networks to reach students across campus. A few days before the event, an email reminder was sent to all conference registrants with the final conference agenda. The cost for marketing (printing flyers and posters) and conference items (nametags, folders) ranged from \$50 to \$125 each year. The main expense was renting the

hotel conference center and offering beverages and a catered luncheon, which are optional, and not relevant if the conference were held online.

Day-of-Event Description

Below we describe the flow and features of the conference itself. See Table 2 for a sample program schedule.

Table 2. *Sample Program Schedule in Conference Year One*

8:00-8:30am	Registration and Breakfast
8:30-9:30am	360: A Walk Through the Opioid Crisis 360 Speed Learning Table Topics with student & community experts
9:30-9:45am	Welcome The HEALS scholars and team & School of Social Work Dean
9:45-11:15am	Substance Abuse Treatment in the FQHC: Managing the Opioid Crisis Community Wellness Center, Chicago
11:15-11:20am	Break
11:20-12:00pm	Keynote The Illinois Opioid Overdose Prevention & Intervention Task Force Lieutenant Governor
12:00-12:45pm	Lunch
12:45-1:15pm	Advocacy 101 NASW President
1:15-1:55pm	Workshop I: Speak Up! Take Action! Social Work Advocacy Opportunities <i>Learn policies to address the opioid crisis and how to advocate for your clients</i>
1:55-2:00pm	Break
2:00-3:00pm	Workshop II: Narcan Training, Champaign County Public Health Department
3:00-3:15pm	Closing remarks and Next steps for action

360 Speed Learning Roundtable Event

After a brief welcome, both conferences opened with a novel 90-minute speed learning event designed by the team to incorporate many facets of complex issues. This provided attendees with exposure to a range of mini workshop topics within a short amount of time, including health, mental health, policy, practice, advocacy, and social justice dimensions of each conference theme. The conference planning team referred to this portion of the day as the “360 Speed Learning Roundtable Event” because each of the 12-15 conference tables were dedicated to a related topic, such as Stigma Reduction, Racism and the Opioid Crisis (in year one), Adolescents and Sleep, and Youth Suicide Prevention (in year two). The leaders for each table topic were students, faculty, or community experts who prepared a

10-minute interactive teaching activity and discussion suitable for groups of up to 10 learners around each table. These tabletop mini workshops were timed and attendees rotated to a new table every 10 minutes using a free online countdown clock projected onto the large screens. The learning atmosphere was lively and informative.

Other Conference Features

The remainder of the conference events involved a series of formal speakers, panels, and workshops planned by students to highlight the interplay of social work policy and practice. Both conferences featured a high-profile keynote speaker. At the first conference, the team invited the lieutenant governor because she was leading the state's response to the opioid crisis. The second year, the students invited a young Latino state senator who had sponsored several bills related to adolescent and young adult mental health and financial well-being, including student loan forgiveness. The team also assembled an expert panel, moderated by students, to feature diverse perspectives of clinicians, administrators, and policy makers. The NASW president at that time was from our state and was invited to speak on NASW policy priorities at the national level to help students gain a broader view of social work advocacy.

It was important to the students on the planning team that the conference focused on building skills as well as new knowledge. Thus, both conferences ended with a 60-minute practical training opportunity. In year one, attendees completed Narcan training for opioid overdose led by the local public health department; in year two, an attorney used a piece of recent legislation to teach the steps of the policy-making process.

Conference Feedback Questionnaire

The team collected anonymous conference feedback from attendees so student planners could reflect on the impact of their leadership efforts and areas to improve. Attendees were invited to complete an anonymous brief 20-item Google Form to assess satisfaction and perceived knowledge pre- and post-event in two areas: knowledge about the topic of the conference, and knowledge of social workers' role in policy-practice integration. Sample questions include: *Prior to this conference, how much did you know about the opioid crisis in Illinois? After attending the conference, how much do you know about this crisis? On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied were you overall with the conference? What was most valuable about the conference? What was one "take away" you learned? In one word, how would you summarize the impact of this conference on you?*

Outcomes

Student Leadership Development Outcomes

Over the two years, over 40 students took part in small to large ways as leaders in planning and executing the conferences. In addition to the eight students enrolled in the seminars and four additional students serving on the core planning teams, students elicited help from more than 30 other student peers who also volunteered to help. These additional

students who were recruited by our team led table topics that brought in diverse voices and perspectives on the topic, helped with marketing, or assisted with registration. Student registrants were enthusiastic about the visible leadership roles by their peers and readily volunteered to contribute to the success of these polished, school-wide professional events that benefited more than 220 attendees.

Leadership skills acquired, demonstrated, and strengthened as part of this process included: teamwork, project planning, critical thinking, organization, spreadsheet management, budgeting, communication with state legislators and experts, conflict resolution, research, writing, and public speaking. Student leadership led to additional networking and advocacy opportunities. For example, a local TV station covered the opioid crisis conference and interviewed the student planning team about the opioid crisis for the evening news. The next year, one of the student planners was invited to meet with the featured state senator and his staff at his local office to further discuss the student's policy interests. Overall, the program succeeded in its goal of building leadership capacity among students as evidenced by high student engagement, positive evaluations of the conferences, and the final artifacts and deliverables developed and executed in a public venue as a result of student co-leadership.

Conference Feedback

To explore the real-world value and impact of the conference, the planning team reviewed attendance data and feedback from the conference attendees from the Google Form. The information in Table 2 summarizing conference attendees and their feedback is included to illustrate how students can collect and interpret data to improve their leadership practice and effectiveness at organizing events. Gathering and using data to inform leadership practice is a fundamental social work and leadership skill. The CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE, 2022) expect social workers to engage in evaluation of social work practice with groups and communities as the ninth competency for social work education. As students learned to engage in policy-practice, information from the conference feedback form was utilized to help them evaluate the impact of their efforts on conference attendees and to reflect on their strengths and challenges in learning to be leaders through this process.

Conference Attendees

Cumulatively the two conferences drew 221 participants. Most attendees were students and faculty/staff from the host university's school of social work, plus other students from campus, community providers and leaders, and policy experts (see Table 3). All attendees received an email immediately following the event with a link to resources and a link to an anonymous conference evaluation survey assessing satisfaction and self-reported pre and post knowledge. Response rates ranged from 32% to 39%. Most respondents were from the school of social work, under the age of 30, and female (Table 3).

Table 3. *Conference Attendee Characteristics, Feedback, and Satisfaction*

<i>Sample characteristics</i>	n (%) / M (SD)			
	Year One		Year Two	
	<u>Attendees</u> (n=160)	<u>Survey Respondents</u> (n=51)	<u>Attendees</u> (n=56)	<u>Survey Respondents</u> (n=22)
Occupation				
Student - BSW	28 (17.5%)	7 (13.7%)	5 (8.9%)	5 (22.7%)
Student - MSW	69 (43.1%)	24 (47.1%)	11 (19.6%)	5 (22.7%)
Student – PhD	9 (5.6%)	2 (3.9%)	7 (12.5%)	6 (27.3%)
Student – other units	16 (10%)	1 (2%)	5 (8.9%)	1 (4.5%)
Faculty/staff	24 (15%)	12 (23.5%)	10 (17.6%)	3 (13.6%)
Community ¹	14 (8.8%)	4 (7.8%)	18 (32.3%)	1 (4.5%)
Age			Age	
18-25		26 (51%)	< 30	13 (59.1%)
26-35		4 (7.8%)	31-49	6 (27.3%)
36-45		7 (13.7%)	50+	3 (13.6%)
46-55		9 (17.6%)		
56+		4 (7.9%)		
Missing		1 (2.0%)		
Sex				
Male		6 (11.8%)		1 (4.5%)
Female		44 (86.3%)		20 (90.9%)
Other		1 (1.9%)		1 (4.5%)
Role at conference				
Attendee		36 (70.6%)		11 (50.0%)
360 table leader		5 (9.8%)		8 (36.4%)
Advocacy leader		9 (17.6%)		3 (13.6%)
Other		1 (2%)		
<i>Conference ratings</i>		<u>M (SD)</u>		<u>M (SD)</u>
Satisfaction (1-5)				
Overall satisfaction		4.4 (0.64)		4.5 (0.51)
Venue		4.8 (0.51)		4.5 (0.80)
Usefulness of:				
360 speed learning tables		4.1 (1.04)		4.0 (1.97)
FQHC OUD care team		4.7 (0.85)		-
Panel of providers				3.9 (1.95)
Keynote address		3.6 (1.37)		3.9 (1.97)
NASW update		4.1 (1.04)		3.1 (2.14)
Policy advocacy workshop		3.8 (1.3)		-
Policy advocacy lecture				2.4 (2.10)

Notes. FQHC=Federally Qualified Health Center. OUD=Opioid Use Disorder. NASW=National Association of Social Workers.

Satisfaction and Usefulness range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Attendance in Year 1 = 160 (response rate 32%); Year 2 = 56 (response rate 39%).

¹Community attendees included invited legislators, government officials, practitioners, and alumni.

Conference Attendee Satisfaction and Learning

The attendee feedback that the team collected showed a high degree of satisfaction and perceived usefulness of most components in both years (Table 3). Attendees also reported that their knowledge about the topic of the conference and social workers’ role in policy practice integration increased. Attendees were asked to provide one “key takeaway” on the

post-event evaluation, and these illustrated gains in participants’ advocacy skills, understanding of social justice aspects of policy, and the importance of policy and practice integration (Table 4).

Table 4. *Key Takeaways Reported by Attendees in Years One and Two*

Year one: Opioid crisis	Illustrative quotes
Gaining skills through Narcan/Naloxone training (17)	<i>The Naloxone training was practical and useful. I would now know what to do if I encountered an overdose situation.</i>
Learning about the social justice dimensions to opioid crisis and its long history (12)	<i>Both the presence of opioid deaths among African Americans and the efforts by medical centers and social workers to provide viable interventions and reduce needless deaths.</i>
Understanding the importance of policy and advocacy (7)	<i>Advocacy is so crucial to make change happen, especially in an issue that is as pressing and relevant as the opioid crisis.</i>
Learning about integrated care models (7)	<i>Integrated care is really the key to long-term successful addiction treatment / health maintenance.</i>
Valuing social work role and contributions to solutions (3)	<i>Social workers play an integral part in the aversion of this crisis.</i>
Year two: Young adult health	Illustrative quotes
Understanding the importance of young adult health (5)	<i>We need to be talking about young adult health. I wish my peers knew the importance of sleep and were aware of the negative effects of vaping.</i>
Understanding the importance of social work policy and advocacy (5)	<i>Policy is important and you have to believe you can make a difference and the truth is you can. You have to fight and care but it's true everyone can make a difference and affect policy. Be heard!</i>
Valuing holistic views of health (4)	<i>How much our health is not just our choice of what we eat and exercise.</i>
<i>Note.</i> The number of times each key takeaway theme was mentioned is shown in parentheses.	

Discussion and Implications for Social Work Education

We used a 1-credit leadership development seminar that facilitated close collaboration among social work students at all levels (BSW, MSW, and doctoral) and faculty to plan a large school-wide professional event. Each year, the project culminated in a formal spring conference held in a professional public venue on topics of students’ choosing relevant to social work leadership in policy-practice integration.

Our experience suggests that student involvement and co-leadership in a seminar course that is designed around conference planning, project-based learning, and student-faculty/staff collaboration is a practical and viable pedagogical method for educating emerging social work leaders. This approach responds to the professional imperative to teach leadership skills to social work students (CSWE, 2022; Sullivan, 2016) and to the gap in methods to do so (Lucas & Goodman, 2015).

It was important for students to gather feedback from conference attendees for several reasons. First, in keeping with the CSWE 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE, 2022), Competency Nine describes the importance of routine evaluation of social work services or interventions with individuals, groups, and communities. Using a simple Google forms tool to solicit feedback from conference attendees enabled students to evaluate their own efforts and reflect on the potential impact of the conference on the community of attendees, an aspect of competent social work macro practice and a best practice in any professional continuing education activity.

Second, incorporating a means of assessing the impact of student efforts in the real world addressed a gap in the literature; namely, that project-based learning evaluations often monitor what students did, but as noted by Guo et al. (2020), they rarely attempt to assess outcomes, usefulness, or real-world relevance and impact of students' final projects. Finally, student involvement in evaluating the impact of their project supported the collaborative spirit of this approach in which students are co-designers of their learning and co-evaluators of the impact of their efforts (Bovill, 2020; Bovill et al., 2016). Overall, the successful outcomes of the conference suggest that this approach not only elicited leadership skills but also contributed in a positive and measurable way to the social work school and campus community.

Other fields such as organizational management have utilized project-based learning to cultivate leadership skills (Lucas & Goodman, 2015; Scarborough et al., 2004), but this seems to be an underexamined method in social work as a key strategy to teach social work leadership. The skills gained through project-based learning are highly relevant for leadership training such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and project planning (Campo et al., 2023; DelSesto et al., 2025; Lucas & Goodman, 2015; Scarborough et al., 2004). While project-based learning typically involves student groups working independently among themselves (Guo et al., 2020), we diverged from that model to emphasize collaboration between students, faculty, and staff. This blending of project-based learning and student-staff-faculty collaboration, guided by sociocultural learning theory (Moghadam, 2025; Vygotsky, 1978), highlights the relational nature of learning and the beneficial nature of scaffolding leadership skills and tasks while offering a flexible level of support from faculty and near peers to help students achieve more than they could alone (Davis et al., 2017; Rodriguez, 2022). In keeping with Vygotsky's constructivist approach to learning, the problem or challenge of conference planning preceded and prompted the learning and leadership building activity (Lai, 2023; Moghadam, 2025).

We encouraged students to fill all four roles of co-creation that have been identified in the student-staff partnership model: representative, pedagogical co-designer, consultant, and co-researcher roles (Bovill et al., 2016), to maximize opportunities for growth. This approach emphasized student *representation* in all aspects of planning and leading; engaged students as equal *co-researchers* and *co-designers* of the conference theme, keynotes, and workshops; and utilized students and staff as *equal consultants* based on their content expertise, prior experience, and social networks. By doing so, we were able to achieve many of the documented benefits of student-staff partnerships, including mutual respect, valuing individual contributions regardless of role in the academy as student or

academic staff, shared decision-making and influence, a sense of ownership of final product, and shared responsibility for outcomes (Martens et al., 2019).

Conference planning has the potential to be a pedagogical vehicle to scaffold opportunities for students to practice new skills and develop confidence, learn in relationship with more experienced peers and mentors, and simultaneously gain substantive knowledge related to social work-related conference themes. The resulting real-world conference in these examples made the project meaningful and visible in the public eye and gave students a set of tangible artifacts (e.g., program, flyers, pictures, video, handouts, evaluation feedback) to document their skills and experience and reinforce their self-concept as leaders. Overall, the outcomes of this project suggest that *students grow as leaders when they are supported and entrusted as leaders in the co-design of their own education*. Opportunities for student-led events and project-based learning, co-creation of learning experiences in structured partnership models with faculty, and classroom projects with real-world impact need to be prioritized in social work education.

Limitations

A limitation of this approach is the small size of the student planning groups. While this model can be replicated, it is not easily scalable to all students in a program and is labor intensive for the faculty sponsor. However, we found that even a small group of students in a leadership seminar can have a substantial impact on the entire student body, by inviting and inspiring peers to attend and volunteer to support a student-led learning event. Another potential limitation is cost. We rented a hotel conference ballroom and provided a luncheon, but events could be held on campus, public library, or community center to lower the venue cost.

Conclusion

In summary, students learn by leading. They grow as leaders when they are supported and entrusted as leaders in the co-design of their own education that addresses real-world problems. This project illustrates a promising and replicable pedagogical approach to leadership development that is recommended for social work students at every level. The need for social work leadership in policy practice is sorely needed to transform healthcare and behavioral health care systems to be more equitable, accessible, and holistic, and to advance the social justice mission of our profession. The approach described here is one way we can partner with social work students to co-create learning-by-doing opportunities to become confident and creative leaders in their workplaces and society.

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