The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) is an annual, national survey of leadership development among college students. It explores the role of higher education in developing leadership capacities with a special focus on specific environmental conditions that foster leadership development. MSL is conducted in partnership with the National Clearinghouse of Leadership Programs (NCLP).

The MSL examines student leadership values at both the institutional and national levels with specific attention to the campus experience factors that influence leadership development in college students. The theoretical framework is the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996), which is the leadership model that the student affairs division chose as our foundation for student leadership development programming following a year-long study in 2007.

We administered the MSL in spring 2011. All undergraduates were invited to participate via a web survey; we realized a 43.5% response rate. Our responses are compared to general outcome measures in five peer groups: national, small, private, masters and secular. The national sample was 21,075 from a few dozen colleges and universities.

Key research questions:
- How do college students score on the eight leadership values associated with the Social Change Model?
- How do scores compare across particular demographic factors, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and class-standing?
- What environmental factors (e.g., co-curricular involvement, study abroad) contribute to higher scores on the leadership outcomes?

Compared to our results from the 2009 administration of the MSL, our students showed a slight improvement in all nine Social Change Model categories. However, we are still lower than the national sample and the four peer groups for 2011. Fortunately, out of eleven categories and five comparison groups, only one of the possible fifty-five comparisons showed a statistically significant difference (in the area of citizenship, compared to our small school peers). This is quite different from two years ago, when almost three-quarters of the comparisons showed AU students significantly weaker in leadership skills.

Interesting general findings:
- Percentage of students identifying as GLBT is over 8.5%, almost double the national sample and every peer group we chose to compare ourselves to.
- As expected, there is a positive relationship between GPA and leadership change across all measures.
- Students who identify as multiracial have higher outcomes in seven out of nine leadership categories; women are showing stronger outcomes, and as expected, leadership growth increases with each class year. Note, however, that our women students tend to arrive at Alfred University with lower leadership efficacy than our men students, so it follows that there might be a greater gain.
• Very few significant differences appear when comparing transfer status, age (trad/non-trad),
  political affiliation, sexual orientation, ability/disability, or first generation/non-first gen.
• We had a higher response rate than in 2009, and were among the highest of all the schools.

Regarding specific leadership experiences we offer at AU, we looked at three areas in great detail:

1. Which environments had higher scores overall than our comparison groups? Three experiences stood
   out in the 2011 administration: identity-based groups, Resident Assistants, and advocacy groups. These
   three alone showed stronger scores than the comparison groups.

2. Which social change factors showed the greatest change from high school to senior year? Our seniors
   showed significant growth in many areas. The most striking effect sizes were in the areas of
   consciousness of self and leadership efficacy.

3. Which environments showed the greatest change as a result of engagement in those experiences?
   Students who engaged in the following experiences reported a significant growth in several Social
   Change Model leadership outcomes, compared to those who did not:
   • Internship experience
   • Community service experience
   • Identity-based groups
   • Campus activities programming (e.g. SAB)
   • Peer helpers
   • Advocacy groups

These experiences showed little impact on leadership growth as measured by the Social Change model.
• Academic student groups
• Campus media
• Orientation guides
• Intercollegiate sports
• Student government

Our custom questions yielded some interesting findings on their own, and compared to the previous
administration.
• Over half our students enjoy the outdoors more now than they did in high school, a promising
  finding given our current emphasis on “wellness within wilderness.”
• Students who participate in clubs/organizations say the three most important benefits are making
  new friends (74%), improved self confidence (51%) and better leadership skills (43%). The top
  three, as well as the percentages, are virtually identical to the last administration.
• When asked what would make their experiences in sports, clubs and organizations more valuable,
  the top responses out of 11 were more emphasis on teamwork and better communication skills.
• Students who have served as peer mentors of any kind report that the most valuable benefits were
  better leadership skills, improved self-confidence, and creating positive change in their
  communities.
• 85% of respondents indicated that it was important to find a mentor.
• Students who wish to participate in community service want one-time or occasional service
  opportunities rather than ongoing, and the majority of respondents indicated that they do not have
  time to conduct any service at all.
• Of the respondents who became involved in activities outside the classroom, 93% thought that
  involvement contributed to knowledge and skills that will help them beyond Alfred.
• 49% believe their professors value their out-of-classroom involvement at Alfred.
Conclusions and next steps

After reviewing the MSL 2011, we have concluded the following:

- While we showed less striking gains from particular experiences, our overall scores in all social change areas were higher than in the previous administration.
- Leadership efficacy (level of confidence in one’s ability to lead) and “consciousness of self” are the areas of greatest change from high school to senior year.
- Mentoring is an area that shows greater impact on leadership than we were expecting. We plan to dig deeper into the mentoring subscales to find out more.
- The results of sports experiences are surprising, once again, in showing low levels of growth. However, in discussion with the research study developers, this is a common finding across colleges. They remind us that the MSL measures social change leadership, not traditional leadership models, and that many athletics programs do not stress social change leadership.

We received a very rich and detailed dataset from the MSL group, with plenty of opportunity for more detailed analysis of our programs with regard to leadership, should anyone wish to mention it to a student seeking a research opportunity. In addition, students had the opportunity to write in their own definitions of leadership, and these qualitative results are equally worthy of study.

After the 2009 administration, we commissioned two undergraduate research projects funded by the Bernstein Leadership Award and the WLC Undergraduate Research fund. The first studied the environments at AU that provide great leadership outcomes for our students, and provided a set of guidelines for lesser performing experiences. The second studied the qualitative results to determine gender and class-based differences in how leadership is defined. We believe that the 2011 results show that we applied the results of assessment and research to improve our programs.

This year, we hope to work with school psychology students as consultants to help us study this data. MSL researchers have indicated a strong interest in what we are doing with the qualitative results in particular. As we are now a StudentVoice (CampusLabs) partner, however, we will most likely not administer the MSL again.