ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute

Still receiving winning reviews in its second year

by Larry Hardesty

"Harvard professors, stimulating materials, wonderful classmates: The quality of the experience was astoundingly high."

"The ACRL Leadership Institute helped me focus in a strategic way on my own leadership style so that I can be a more self-aware and effective leader."

"For me, the most significant aspect of the whole experience was the opportunity to observe master teachers in action."

"This institute was effective for me on a personal level because I think many of the concepts, readings, etc. are applicable in our daily lives, whether at the workplace or with family or in social situations."

These are a few of the comments shared with me by my fellow participants in the second ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute. Held on the Harvard University campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from July 30–August 4, 2000, the Leadership Institute provided an intensive residential experience in improving leadership among academic librarians.

The second year of the program drew approximately 80 participants from 29 states, plus Canada, Costa Rica, and Germany, with participants ranging from individuals relatively early in their careers to some nearing the end of their careers.

All of the participants held leadership positions, generally as mid-career senior administrators—library directors, deans, assistant directors, and department heads—from a full range of academic libraries. Despite our varied responsibilities, on the very first day an Institute faculty member cautioned us, "Leadership is not a position; it is something that happens." Over the course of five days we had an intense experience in learning how to be more effective in making "something happen."

We worked hard *and* had fun

I could write that the Leadership Institute was something like scenes out of "Paper Chase" with voluminous readings, late-night study groups, and awkward moments as demanding, unforgiving faculty members called on hesitant students to analyze complicated case studies—but it wasn't.

While we had extensive readings and did analyze case studies, Cliff Baden, director of Programs of Professional Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, in our

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very first meeting tried to dispel any anxiety about the "Harvard experience." We worked, and sometimes worked hard, but we had fun, learned a lot, and it did not seem like work.

The format of the Institute remained quite similar to that of the very successful first year.[1] In fact, most of us had learned of the Institute from the first-year participants and came anticipating a similar experience.

Each day started with small-group discussions of approximately eight people. From there we moved to a variety of instructional settings ranging from faculty presentations to class discussions to one-on-one dialogue.

Prior to arriving we received reading assignments, and we had additional reading assignments each day. Generally the assignments proved interesting, thought provoking, and seldom burdensome. No one was called on to stand up and analyze a case or summarize its salient points—at least not without raising his or her hand to volunteer to do so.

Interactive learning
We found the Harvard faculty high energy, provocative, insightful, well-read, and sometimes just down right entertaining. They, however, did not just stand at the front of the room and give us great lectures. In fact, anything resembling a lecture seemed few and far between.

As one participant shared with me, "Susan Moore Johnson, Jim Honan, and Bob Kegan were three of the best teachers I have ever seen in action. While their styles were distinct, they were all very skilled at communicating content, then engaging a large group in discussion and interaction. They took a lecture hall and made it into a seminar room."

The faculty demonstrated interactive learning in practice, and seemed to effortlessly switch from one teaching strategy to another as they led us along a learning path. Never did I catch myself thinking, "Okay, when does this session end," or "Wonder where I will go to eat tonight." It was great!

The sessions
Much of the Institute focused on the text *Reframing Organizations* by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal.[2] We received a copy several

weeks ahead of time to read selected chapters, but we quickly learned that we should have read all the chapters (a note for next year's class).

Susan Moore Johnson, professor of Teaching and Learning at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and former academic dean, started us out Monday morning with a discussion of the four frames of reference (structural, human resources, political, and symbolic) from this text—you have to read the book to learn what this means.

Jim Honan, lecturer on Education and Educational Programs for the Project on Faculty Appointments at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, followed the next day by leading us through a case study (one of several) using the frames of reference.

One highlight of the Institute occurred a few days after we had thoroughly analyzed a case study of an institution going through a change of mission. Honan then got the president of the institution on the phone, and we had an opportunity to ask the president questions.

Question: "During the transition, did you ever think about going back to the old mission?" Response: "Oh, just about every week!"

Later in the week Robert Kegan, chair of the Learning and Teaching area at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and professor of Adult Learning and Professional Development, took us down the path of how adult development (yes, we still are developing in our adulthood) relates to leadership.

Kegan had the group examine a case study from his book, *In Over Our Heads*.[3] He used phrases such as "the socialized mind," "the self-authoring mind," and "the self-transforming mind" to help us understand our development in relation to the complexities of the modern workplace—another "must read" book.

In his final session, Kegan guided us through a self-analysis exercise that helped us to examine our "commitments" or what we "really believe in" and what is keeping us from having our "commitments" more fully realized. He then asked us to reflect on what might be our "counter commitments," or that is, what we might be just a "little concerned or just a little bit afraid about" if we tried harder to achieve our "commitments." With his characteristic good humor, he told us that

in doing the exercise in a corporate setting someone responded, "You mean like—losing our jobs!"

Kegan then charged us to reflect on our fears, go back home, and test some of those big assumptions that kept us from realizing our goals. He cautioned us not to test our assumptions by jumping over the cliff of "big assumptions" and lose our jobs. Instead, he recommended that we cautiously tiptoe up to the edge of the cliff, delicately put our big toe over, and see if there is firm ground where we had assumed there was an abyss. We might just discover there is a solid footing on which to proceed even further.

Applying what we learned

Maureen Sullivan, former president of ACRL and a library organizational development consultant who helped design the curriculum, led us through sessions that addressed the importance of strategy and visionary leadership in effective leadership in academic and research libraries. She emphasized "a sustained commitment to a clear vision." In the final session on Friday morning, Sullivan helped us to synthesize what we had learned and how it could be applied to the library setting.

The final exercise, after a week of being energized, consisted of each of us developing one step that we planned to take within the next two-to-four weeks.

On a volunteer basis, we each shared this one step within a small group of fellow participants, and then we invited someone from the small group to check in with us to see what we did after going home. In turn, each of us volunteered to call upon someone else.

After a week of selected readings, guided discussions, and informal sharing over coffee and meals, we ended with an assessment of the Institute. In the closing remarks, fellow participants spoke of valuing the fluid nature of the group, the mix of small and large groups, the ample time for discussion, and the opportunity to see master teachers in action.

They also appreciated the opportunity (thanks to the quick efforts of John Collins III, head of the Gutman Education Library at Harvard) to tour some of the Harvard libraries. Mostly we enjoyed the elevated level of discourse that allowed us to reflect on the

challenges we face and how to confront them.

"Transforming?" "Life-changing?" Well, maybe. Certainly some participants used those words. However, that level of impact on experienced mid-career librarians is a pretty high expectation. Only time will tell as each of us returns to our home libraries and tries to apply what we have learned. Nevertheless, I think we all agree that the Harvard Leadership Institute provided us an extraordinary professional development opportunity.

I want to extend my personal appreciation for all those individuals who worked hard to make it happen, and I encourage the reader to think about participating in the Harvard Leadership Institute next year. As with a good book, I highly recommend it. There is something in it for everyone.

Notes

1. Laverna Saunders, "ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute: Professional development at its best, *C&RL News* (September 1999): 645–47.

2. Lee B. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1997).

3. Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). ■

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We can also make a difference by being informed about the complexities of digital archiving and making sure that there are meaningful actions behind publishers' and vendors' words. If we do so, libraries will continue to play an essential role in the archiving of digital materials.

Notes

1. CLIR's reports on approaches to digital archiving can be consulted on the Web at www.clir.org.

2. Visit http://www.clir.org/diglib/preserve/criteria.htm for more information about the minimum criteria for archival repositories of electronic journals. ■

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