**LEADERSHIP ACADEMY EXPERIENCE SUMMARY**

**By**

**Heba Nazmy**

**Kim Fake**

**Ian Clemente**

1. **What did you do/accomplish?**

At the beginning of MSU’s Leadership Academy, when the Spring 2018 cohort was asked to brainstorm potential leadership projects to undertake, we (Kim, Heba and Ian) came together with a shared vision of producing a central database of information relevant to graduate students. Many MSU graduate and professional students, across a wide variety of academic disciplines, have reported having considerable difficulty finding information that is pertinent to them in a timely manner. Finding such information, academic or otherwise, is often a daunting task that requires visiting many websites or even extensive networking, which can add considerable stress to their already large workloads. During the six weeks of the Leadership Academy, we conducted a survey to determine what information graduate students would want in a central location, networked to find other groups with similar goals or useful expertise, and combined forces with another entity that can ensure the accomplishment of our goal in the long-term.

First, we developed a short open-ended questionnaire that we distributed to our Leadership Academy cohort, for they were a readily available group of diverse graduate students from departments all over campus who were already highly attuned to the needs and difficulties that MSU students might regularly face. We reviewed the survey responses and compiled a list of information graduate students would want in a central location, paying attention to the common themes that appeared in responses. The themes that emerged included the following:

* Relevant Information/Contacts (important phone numbers, events calendar, links to relevant student-related websites like COGS, Title IX/SARV protocol and resources)
* Academic/Student-Oriented (comprehensive exam tips, communication with advisors, international student resources, RCPD information, available scholarships/grants)
* Professional/Career-Oriented (Employee Assistance, internships/part-time jobs, workshop/seminar schedules, available TA/RA positions)
* Extracurricular (grad student groups, list of sports-related activities)
* Well Being/Health-Related (exercise/wellness information, mental health resources)
* Housing/Financial Resources (discounts/offers for grad students, housing, carpooling)
* On-Campus/Off-Campus Events (places to socialize/dine, art/music performances)

Next, we networked to find other on-campus that could aid us in our goal. Thanks to Ian’s connection, he was able to discuss our goal with the Council of Graduate Students’ (COGS) President Fuente, who suggested we talked to the Chair of the Graduate Welfare Committee (GWC), VPEA Maingi, as they had similar plans in the works. We then drafted a letter to VPEA Maingi, who informed us that they are developing a similar app/website and invited us to an upcoming GWC meeting during which we could discuss and compare our goals to that of COGS GWC. During the meeting on February 12th, we shared our goals, learned about the GWC’s goals, and made plans to work together to achieve our shared goal. COGS was appreciative of our survey results, which they plan to compare with their current plans to determine if there is any information still missing from their site that we determined to be important via our survey. Heba, Ian, and Kim plan to continue to work with COGS following the completion of the Leadership Academy, in order to ensure their goal of creating a central source of information for graduate students is fully realized. In turn, based off the feedback received from the GWC, this collaboration might also involve examining what modifications might need to be made to existing features (e.g., where to add an interdepartmental seminar calendar) and how to best communicate the existence of this compiled resource.

**2. What did you learn (about leadership, about yourselves, about emotional intelligence, or anything along those lines)?**

*Heba:*

As an international PhD student joining the leadership academy was of great help to me. It provided me networking and learning opportunities. From different meetings of the leadership academy, I learned different characteristics that define leaders. I was also introduced to leaderships skills and had the chance to practice them. I had a presentation during the period of the academy and I noticed a great difference in how I prepared and handle it. I felt much less nervous than I used to be before. I also noticed an improvement in the way I communicate with students in the classes that I assist in teaching. Thanks to the emotional intelligence knowledge that I acquired during the leadership academy. It helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses and how to deal with them and work on improving them. In conclusion, learning about leadership skills and specifically emotional intelligence contributed to my overall wellbeing. It helped me communicate in a more efficient way. For me as an international student this is very important, as the better I can communicate with my colleagues, advisor, and potential employers the more I feel confident and less stressed.

*Kim:*

I learned so much about myself, emotional intelligence, and leadership. First, I learned the importance of learning about those you lead. The more you know about the people you are leading the better you can lead them with understanding and guide them to complete your mutual goals. You must build off an individual’s own motives, not create their motivation for them; thus, it is very helpful to know what personal motivation each team member brings to the table and then determine how to use those motives to move you as a group towards a shared higher goal. I also learned about emotional intelligence, which I had not heard of prior to this course. This concept related well to other concepts I was learning, such as self-awareness, mindfulness, networking, etc. Emotional intelligence combined many of the skills and advice I have receive into one cohesive idea through the four components (self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and social-management). Reading emotional intelligence 2.0 gave me a greater understanding of emotional intelligence and how I can practice my emotional intelligence skills to improve my ability to work with and lead others. Lastly, through our discussions and group project I learned about myself and others. I realized I don’t give myself enough credit for my current leadership skills, such as organization, self-awareness, self-management, and public speaking. I also learned about the areas I need to grow significantly. For example, I am lacking in my social awareness and social management. I need to remind myself to be more mindful in my interactions with others and invest myself more in my team members to be able to motivate and guide them.

*Ian:*

Thinking about the Leadership Academy in general, it was a truly enriching experience to see the various ways that leaders can make a positive impact on the people around them. Some individuals were more outspoken, others were quieter but effectively chose their points to speak up, and others led through their actions and the commitment to the Academy’s efforts that they reflected. It is important for a leader, or someone simply trying to be more compassionate towards others, to adjust his or her behavior accordingly in order to help the larger group be more successful in their endeavors. But the beauty about that effort is that by noting the different strengths and flaws that each team member has, it can help being out the best in yourself as well.

Such larger sentiments tie in largely to what I’ve learned working alongside Kim and Heba. First, it is important to learn about your team members and what roles or courses of actions they are comfortable with, which entails being willing to learn about their preferences and sensitive enough to adjust the team’s efforts around them. From planning how we communicated to coordinating our dialogue with the GWC, Heba, Kim and I all worked hard to be attuned to what each person was comfortable with doing and what was feasible for them practically (due to the demands as graduate students that we each naturally had to balance with work for the Academy). Second, it is important to be open to changes in your overall strategies and maybe even your overall goals when pertinent information is received, since that can help foster more fruitful collaboration and make any expenditure of effort more efficient in nature. When we learned the significant efforts that GWC (and COGS in general) had already put in to create an information portal themselves, it no longer made sense to try rebuilding everything ourselves. Rather, our goals adjusted in an adaptive manner, more towards helping the GWC refine their resource and determine the best methods of informing MSU students about its existence. And finally, this Academy helped remind me of the importance of taking care of yourself, and the value of trusting those you work alongside at your lowest points (thereby helping you put forth your greatest effort in the end). I cannot express how grateful I am for the kindness given to me by Heba and Kim, along with those running (and participating in) the Academy, when I was experiencing some truly challenging personal obstacles. It is my hope that I can follow their example as and display a similar degree of decency, along with a proper amount of responsiveness and social awareness, to display a greater level of leadership in the future.