Executive Summary of an External Evaluation of the OULP

Preface: The overall goal of the Ohio University Leadership Project (OULP) is to improve the skills and knowledge of school leaders. Their enhanced skills and knowledge can contribute to the development of an engaging dynamic for improved teaching and learning, and most importantly for increased student achievement. For this reason, it was decided to study the impact that the OULP has had on its participants. An outside evaluator was hired to conduct an evaluation of the OULP. She focused her efforts primarily upon the OULP's elementary principals', secondary principals', superintendents', and treasurers' cohorts.

You will find excerpts of the report throughout this newsletter. The entire report was too lengthy to include in this document.

You will find below four major findings of the evaluation:

- This summative evaluation of the Ohio University Leadership Project (OULP) produced results that strongly suggest the OULP to be a highly effective form of professional development that meets the needs of the region's school administrators.
- OULP seminars (both cohort and non-cohort programs) have attracted participants from over 70 of Ohio's 88 counties.
- Outcomes of participation go beyond changes in attitudes, knowledge, and skills to affect positively those who are under these participants' leadership, and thus constitute a deeper level of training effect. Although the effects are self-report, they are promising indicators of OULP's success as a model professional development program.
- The major conclusion from this evaluation is that the OULP should continue to offer professional development in its current structure and format.
Continuation of Evaluation Report: Introduction

The Beginning: In 1994, the Ohio University Leadership Project (OULP) began delivering much-needed professional development opportunities to school administrators in Southeastern and South Central Ohio, to which it is still primarily focused. But, in the last several years, educational leaders from over 80% of the counties in Ohio and from every region of the state have participated in the OULP’s varied professional development opportunities.

Cohort Delivery Mechanisms: The foundation of the OULP’s programs is the cohort component. It consists of groups of administrators, organized by their titles and responsibilities. More specifically, there is an elementary principal cohort, a secondary principal cohort, a superintendent cohort, and a treasurer cohort. The participants in each cohort attend seminars together during a school year.

Other Delivery Mechanisms: The OULP conducts other professional development programs as well, which tend to be directed at school leaders both within and outside the regions served by the cohort program. The OULP’s seminars are designed utilizing experiential-based, databased, and research-based decision-making.

Overall Delivery Considerations: Mentoring, reflection, and dialogue are incorporated, and the professional development is delivered on an ongoing basis via administrator cohorts, workshops and technical assistance in districts, and large-scale workshops on particularly pertinent topics (e.g., teacher evaluation and five-year forecasting).
Continuation of Evaluation Report: Research Process

6. What are the effects of the program on the participants’ professional growth? More specifically, what changes in attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs have participants experienced as a result of the project?

7. What effect has the participants’ professional growth had on those who are affected by participants’ leadership?

Collection of Data Pertaining to the Cohort Program: In order to answer the seven questions, three main data collection activities were conducted during the spring of 2002. A database was created in order to be better able to analyze program documents, including participation over the past three years. Analysis of the database allowed the evaluator to determine the extent of participation across school districts and counties.

A participant survey was sent to all those who had participated in cohorts during the past two years of the OULP. Focus groups were held with each of the four cohort groups (elementary principals, secondary principals, superintendents, and treasurers) in order to expand upon the themes in the participant survey, and answer more thoroughly the evaluation questions.

Research Questions: Several overarching questions guided the evaluation of the Ohio University Leadership Project (OULP):

1. What factors draw participants into this particular professional development program?

2. What do participants view to be their most pressing professional development needs?

3. What are the impediments to participation in meaningful professional development?

4. What program methods are perceived as most and least effective?

5. From the vantage of participants, what is missing from the program?
Continuation of Evaluation Report: Summary of Survey and Focus Group Findings

Survey Findings
The responses to the surveys can be summarized with the following statements:

- Responses to the surveys reported high levels of satisfaction with the OULP, considering it a valuable professional development experience.

- The participants indicated that their main reasons for participating in the OULP included the valuable and timely topics, the opportunity to share and network with peers, and to obtain professional development.

- And the most effective features of the OULP, according to the survey respondents, were the speakers and topics, and having the opportunity to discuss problems and solutions with peers. These themes accounted for over two-thirds of the responses to the question about effective program features.

Focus Group Findings
The following items represent a summary of the reactions obtained in the focus groups sessions. They were:

- The main reasons for participating mirrored the responses on the survey. Participants wanted to acquire the explicit and tacit knowledge and skills associated with school leadership.

- Staying current in their knowledge of legislation, laws, and initiatives was the most pressing professional development need of these administrators.

- Interaction, both in roundtable discussions and more informally at lunch or after the seminars, was encouraged by Dr. Larson’s professional and inviting manner.
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- Being able to more effectively manage change was a significant outcome of participation for the focus group participants.

- Learning to “see the big picture,” gaining perspective, and learning from others so as to “not reinvent the wheel” were common and important themes throughout the four focus groups.

- In addition to a better conceptual understanding of the administrative role, the OULP provided administrators with the knowledge and skills to be more effective and confident communicators, problem solvers, and managers.

- The impact of participation in the OULP went beyond the individual participants to those affected by their leadership.

- And all groups considered themselves to be far better at encouraging leadership development than they had been prior to participating in this professional development experience.

These outcomes of the OULP go beyond changes in attitudes, knowledge, and skills, and thus constitute a deeper level of training effect. When evaluating training and professional development, one hopes to see changes in behavior on the job, and an impact on those who surround the “professionally developed” person. Such findings are rare, however. Although the effects discussed here are self-report, they are promising indicators of OULP’s success as a model professional development program.
Conclusion

• The major conclusion from this evaluation is that the OULP should continue to offer professional development in its current structure and format.

• Project staff may also wish to target recruitment efforts both at districts adjoining those where participation is high as well as those districts that lay west of Route 23. Because it is such a successful program with those who have participated, the OULP seems perfectly positioned to expand its programming.

• Overall, this evaluation of the OULP produced results that strongly suggest that the OULP is a highly effective form of professional development that meets the needs of area administrators.

• There were no negative comments made about the program in either the survey or the focus groups.

Information Regarding the External Evaluator

The evaluation and report were conducted and written by Kristine Chadwick. Kristine works as a research & evaluation specialist at a regional educational laboratory, and conducts independent evaluation consulting projects. Currently finishing her doctoral work through the University of Rhode Island, Kristine holds a Master's Degree in Experimental Psychology, with emphases in community psychology, organizational learning, and evaluation research.

Kristine has performed mixed-method evaluations and needs assessments for more than a decade in diverse program areas, including education (both K-12 and higher education), community level substance abuse prevention, domestic violence prevention, HIV prevention, and service programs for older blind individuals.

Kristine has co-authored an article on professional development for rural principals and regularly presents papers at national conferences. She can be reached at vwevaluator@yahoo.com for information on evaluation consulting services.
Hi Friends of the OULP:

As you have read in this edition of EXTRA, the Ohio University Leadership Project (OULP) was subjected to a thorough evaluation. The results were positive. But, I was not surprised. The level of ownership and commitment that has been exhibited by the participants is the reason that the OULP has been a success. It's a professional development program for and by its participants.

I am appreciative of the efforts of Kristine Chadwick, the evaluator. Kristine conducted a rigorous and time-consuming evaluation. Then, she reduced the results of the evaluation to an articulate report. In fact, its ingredients were placed, as spaced permitted, in this edition of the newsletter.

The results of the evaluation have been carefully reviewed and analyzed by the OULP staff. They will be used to develop and deliver professional development activities, in an even more effective manner, to the OULP's participants.

Until then,

Bill Larson, Director
Ohio University Leadership Project