

## Group Reflection on The Tasks of Leadership by John Gardner

Our PKAL LI team members had similar reactions to The Tasks of Leadership by John Gardner. We recognized that Gardner's voice carries authority, and his essay gave us the sense of "foundation" in talking about leadership—a common vocabulary of examples of leadership in the past and of language and analytical ways of discussing the components, stages, or patterns in preparing for and delivering institutional leadership. We paused for a moment on the range of examples—mostly male, mostly military or political – and presume to believe that leadership in an academic setting is more about the power of rigorous arguments and nuanced consensus-building than the typical Machiavellian (see Gardner reference 11) modes of persuasion common in political leadership. This being said, the issues and vocabulary were immediately helpful to us as we began to think about our initiative to improve non-majors science education at Stetson.

While the Gardner article described several tasks of a good leader, Renewing (IX) was the one that resonated most strongly in our discussion about leadership in educational reform. The phrase "trance of non-renewal" became a theme for our discussion, as we acknowledged that the power of inertia and the anxiety of change are phenomena common at our own institution. As Gardner points out, it is difficult to oppose change in principle, but real change is often unpopular because it can appear to threaten an established way of doing things. In fact, the mere anticipation of resistance can become an excuse for non-renewal. Even with the recognition that resistance, or failure of imagination, can be impediments to change, we remain convinced that we can move collegially and collaboratively forward to build understanding across scientific disciplines and with colleagues in the humanities and social sciences and pre-professional fields. One member of the team pointed out that the very act of questioning our current status quo in non-majors science education was the first step on the road to breaking out of the "trance" and starting on the road to the eventual improvement of this important function of the science curriculum. Just as we encourage our students to engage in critical thinking, it is important for us to critically examine why we think it is important for non-scientists to understand science and what knowledge we believe all reflective individuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should possess.

The chronology of our discussion, which began with examples of leadership from Gardner's essay and ended with a conversation about the various claims and proof structures of science and faith, intelligent design and evolution, exemplified to us the great strength that comes from the diversity of our team. In particular, we recognized our "non-scientist" (Dixon Sutherland, Professor of Religious Studies) as someone who can see things from the outside and inject a potentially "trance-breaking" perspective. A view from the outside may be the only way to truly assess whether, in the end, we have really changed.