# JCAPS

# Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Framework for Applied Learning in Campus Activities

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*Campus activities offer students valuable applied learning experiences that enhance their engagement and sense of belonging on campus and act as catalysts for leadership development. The Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (EIL) model offers a structured framework for fostering leadership development in campus activities by emphasizing self-awareness, social awareness, and environmental awareness. With three broad facets and 19 tangible capacities, EIL equips students with skills such as emotional self-control, teamwork, conflict management, and adaptability, which are essential for engaging in leadership in campus activities contexts. Campus activities professionals play an important role in shaping these experiences, providing intentional support, training, and reflection opportunities to maximize student learning. By embedding EIL principles into their work with students, campus activities professionals can cultivate leadership development, strengthen student organizations, and prepare students for future leadership experiences. The author provides strategies for leveraging EIL in campus activities to enhance student leadership growth and development.*

## Introduction

Researchers have long recognized that learning opportunities in college exist beyond the classroom. There are ample opportunities for students to gain experiences outside the classroom, such as joining a student organization, having a mentor, engaging in community service, holding an on-campus job, or attending campus events. Together these experiences, along with many others, contribute to what is recognized on college campuses as *campus activities.* Campus activities provide opportunities to build a sense of community that fosters student engagement and cultivates a sense of connection and belonging (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2023; Huston, 2022; National Association for Campus Activities [NACA], 2025). Further, campus activities create opportunities for learning and growth across various domains including leadership development.

Leadership development involves expanding an individual's capacity to participate in leadership roles and processes across different contexts (Day et al., 2009; Komives et al., 2005; Owen, 2020). Emphasizing aspects such as identity, motivation, readiness to lead, values, and needs, leadership development addresses both intrapersonal and human dimensions of learning (Guthrie & Jenkins,

In this manuscript I first discuss campus activities as applied learning experiences and identify key opportunities for student learning through engaging in campus activities. I next introduce the Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (EIL) model as an applied leadership model that can help support students' learning through engaging in campus activities. I conclude by providing specific applications and strategies for using EIL as a framework to support students' growth and development and to support the health and strength of student organizations and teams.

## Campus Activities as Applied Learning

As educators increasingly emphasize student learning in higher education, they must consider how co-curricular experiences contribute to students' growth and development. Student affairs educators are uniquely situated to shape environments and opportunities that support this process. Applied learning, which has received increasing attention, involves the process through which students develop an understanding and mindset that enable them to connect and apply new knowledge across different contexts and situations within and beyond college (Association of American Colleges & Universities [AAC&U], 2018). Applied learning is not only a critical outcome of higher education, but also a cornerstone of career readiness, as it enables students to develop practical skills, gain real-world experience, and build relationships and networks that will benefit students during college and in their post-college lives and careers.

Higher education provides ample opportunities for applied learning in and out of the formal classroom. The wide range of applied learning opportunities falls into three main categories: (a) curricular applied learning, (b) cocurricular applied learning, and (c) career applied learning (Jach & Trolian, 2019). Cocurricular applied learning includes "service or community-based learning, cocurricular involvement, leadership experiences, and peer learning" (Jach & Trolian, 2019, p. 8). Depending on the nature of one's involvement, there are opportunities for each form of applied learning through campus activities.

The metaphor of a "practice field" is often used to describe the co-curricular context of colleges and universities. Higher education institutions provide a space to "practice" leadership by offering many opportunities to get involved and engage in groups and communities. Through engaging in campus activities, students try out new strategies, skills, or roles – and, just as an athlete does, enhance their effectiveness and hone their skills (Haber-Curran, 2019). Cocurricular opportunities allow students to engage with others and acquire new knowledge in an environment that typically involves fewer risks and consequences than in the "real world" (Mainella, 2017). These applied, hands-on experiences allow students to gain new experiences, insights, and learning that prepare them for future challenges and experiences.

Continuing with the metaphor of a practice field, just like the role of a coach for athletes, student affairs educators play a critical role in supporting students in their development as they make meaning of their experiences. Student affairs educators can provide the scaffolding, structure, and environments for students to reflect, set goals, and synthesize their learning (Haber-Curran, 2019). They play a crucial role in helping students learn from their experiences about (a) themselves as

intentional leadership development of college students involved on campus and engaged in campus activities (e.g., Social Change Model of Leadership Development, Relational Leadership Model, Servant Leadership). Among those models, Emotionally Intelligent Leadership is a framework that explicitly centers the realms of self, others, and the larger context inherent in campus activities experiences (Shankman et al., 2015a).

## Emotionally Intelligent Leadership

First introduced in 2008, Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (EIL) is a model that emphasizes the interplay between self-awareness, social awareness, and environmental awareness in leadership (Shankman et al., 2015a). Informed by Boyer's (1990) scholarship of integration, EIL pulls together concepts of contemporary, process-oriented leadership with key tenets of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence encompasses an awareness dimension (self-awareness and social-awareness) and a behavioral dimension (managing self and managing relationships with others; Goleman, 2000).

Shankman et al. (2015a) argue "emotional intelligence is a core function for effective leadership" (p. 9). The EIL model emphasizes the "importance of emotional intelligence in human interaction, leadership processes, and the dynamic and interdependent relationship between the individual, group, and context in a leadership process" (Haber-Curran & Williamson, 2024, p. 26). Designed to be accessible to college students, the model provides a practical and applied framework for leadership development.

At the core of EIL are three interconnected facets:

*Consciousness of self*: Demonstrating emotionally intelligent leadership involves awareness of one's abilities, emotions, and perceptions. [It] is about prioritizing the inner work of reflection and introspection and appreciating that self-awareness is a continual process.

*Consciousness of others*: Demonstrating emotionally intelligent leadership involves awareness of the abilities, emotions, and perceptions of others. [It] is about intentionally working with and influencing individuals and groups to bring about positive change.

*Consciousness of context*: Demonstrating emotionally intelligent leadership involves awareness of the setting and situation. [It] is about paying attention to how environmental factors and internal group dynamics affect the process of leadership. (Shankman et al., 2015a, p. 10)

An individual's leadership effectiveness depends on their awareness of the three facets. When one or more facets are underdeveloped, one's ability to effectively lead may be weakened. Conversely, with awareness across all three facets, individuals can more intentionally and thoughtfully engage in leadership (Shankman et al., 2015a).

The model includes 19 tangible and actionable capacities that operationalize EIL and reflect the three facets in practice. The three facets and 19 capacities "equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and attitudes" to engage in EIL (Shankman et al., 2015a, p. 9). Although EI is foundational to the model and facets, the capacities in which EI is most evident are *emotional self-*

EIL is particularly relevant in campus activities settings where there are opportunities to develop leadership capacities, work collaboratively with others, and navigate group dynamics and the larger systems in which one is leading. By developing EIL capacities, students can enhance their ability to lead in various settings, from student government and student organizations to intramural sports and service projects – and to leadership opportunities outside of the college environment. Table 1 includes the 19 capacities and a brief description of each capacity.

**Table 1: 19 Capacities EIL Capacities**

| |
| --- |
| *Consciousness of Self* Capacities |
| Emotional self-perception: Identifying emotions and their impact on behavior |
| Emotional self-control: Consciously moderating emotions |
| Authenticity: Being transparent and trustworthy |
| Healthy self-esteem: Having a balanced sense of self |
| Flexibility: Being open and adaptive to change |
| Optimism: Having a positive outlook |
| Initiative: Taking action |
| Achievement: Striving for excellence |
| *Consciousness of Others* Capacities |
| Displaying empathy: Being emotionally in tune with others |
| Inspiring others: Energizing individuals and groups |
| Coaching others: Enhancing the skills and abilities of others |
| Capitalizing on difference: Benefiting from multiple perspectives |
| Developing relationships: Building a network of trusting relationships |
| Building teams: Working with others to accomplish a shared purpose |
| Demonstrating citizenship: Fulfilling responsibilities to the group |
| Managing conflict: Identifying and resolving conflict |
| Facilitating change: Working toward new directions |
| *Consciousness of Context* Capacities |
| Analyzing the group: Interpreting group dynamics |
| Assessing the environment: Interpreting external forces and trends |

Source: Adapted from Shankman et al., 2015a

The 3 facets and 19 capacities provide a structured yet flexible approach to leadership. Although each capacity brings value to various contexts, it is neither necessary nor realistic for individuals to excel in all 19 capacities. Instead, Shankman et al. (2015a) promote developing a well-rounded and adaptable skill set and a greater awareness of when and how to demonstrate different capacities based on the situation. Challenges can arise when capacities are underutilized, misapplied, or even overutilized. This reflects the complexity of leadership and groups and

A key premise of EIL is leadership is not confined to a leadership role but rather is a process that occurs through interactions among individuals, groups, and the larger environment. Further, EIL can be learned and developed with time, practice, and effort, and the college environment provides ample and rich opportunities and spaces to do this.

## Strategies and Applications for Campus Activities Professionals

Although campus activities offerings provide valuable opportunities for students to engage, practice, and learn, meaningful growth and applied learning do not happen automatically for students. Campus activities professionals play a critical role in shaping students' experiences by providing the structure, intentionality, and guidance necessary to help students translate their involvement into deeper learning. Simply participating in campus activities does not guarantee transformative leadership development outcomes—educators must deliberately design environments that foster reflection, skill development, and application. This requires an intentional approach that involves "reflectively and deliberately employing a set of strategies to produce desired outcomes" and maximizing student learning (Harper, 2011, p. 288).

Campus activities professionals are uniquely situated to educate students outside the classroom through various co-curricular experiences. They are in a role in which they can shape environments, create experiences, provide support and guidance, and build ongoing relationships with students. This section includes strategies for campus activities professionals to intentionally approach their roles to center student learning and development, specifically through the framework of EIL. I provide examples of how EIL capacities can be demonstrated in campus activities experiences. I then discuss how EIL can provide a framework for advising and coaching, training and development, supporting the health of student organizations, and supporting and developing teams.

## EIL in a Campus Activities Context

Designed to be applicable for college students engaging in leadership on a college campus, the 19 EIL capacities can each be directly tied to campus activities experiences. Table 2 provides examples of EIL capacities that can be demonstrated and/or developed across various campus activities experiences.

**Table 2: EIL Capacities and Examples Relevant to Campus Activities**

| Capacity | Example |
|---|---|
| Emotional self-perception | <ul><li>Recognizing stress before a big event and seeking support.</li><li>Reflecting on your feelings after not being selected for a leadership position in the group and discussing these feelings with a trusted friend or advisor.</li></ul> |

| Emotional self-control | ● Staying calm during a heated debate in a student government meeting.<br>● Remaining composed when facing technical issues while setting up an event. |
|---|---|
| Authenticity | ● Being honest about personal challenges when mentoring a new student.<br>● Asking for help when you realize that you cannot do something on your own. |
| Healthy self-esteem | ● Sharing your strengths and advocating for yourself when applying for a leadership role.<br>● Accepting constructive feedback after an event and using the feedback to improve. |
| Flexibility | ● Adapting plans when an event is disrupted by bad weather.<br>● Stepping in to take on a group member's role when they are absent. |
| Optimism | ● Encouraging a team after a fundraising event falls short of its goal.<br>● Highlighting the positive outcomes of an event that was poorly attended in order to boost group morale. |
| Initiative | ● Partnering with the counseling center to implement a new destress event during finals week.<br>● Proposing a new mentoring program for incoming members of the organization. |
| Achievement | ● Setting and reaching a goal of increasing membership of the organization by 20%.<br>● Completing the required capstone project to earn a leadership certificate. |
| Displaying empathy | ● Listening to a peer's concerns about their ability to manage multiple responsibilities.<br>● Checking in on a group member when you notice that they are more reserved and quite than usual. |
| Inspiring others | ● Motivating a team to work hard on a campus-wide sustainability project.<br>● Recognizing and celebrating the group's efforts and hard work before kicking off a big event. |
| Coaching others | ● Guiding new club members on how to plan and implement successful events.<br>● Helping new resident assistants get ready to welcome to their new residents by providing guidance and advice for a smooth process. |

## Advising and Coaching

EIL is a helpful framework for advising and coaching students involved in campus activities, whether they hold leadership positions, serve on committees, or participate in student organizations. Educators can apply the model explicitly to guide goal setting, reflection, and feedback, or implicitly by integrating its principles into ongoing mentorship and advising.

When using EIL explicitly, educators can introduce the model to students as a developmental tool, helping them assess their leadership strengths and areas for growth. Students can use the model as a framework for individual reflection or journaling, discussion with advisors or peers, or goal setting. The *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership for Students: Inventory* is a self-assessment instrument that can help students and educators identify strengths and opportunities for growth (Shankman et al., 2015b).

Students' self-assessment can help them gain greater awareness and guide their ongoing leadership development. Coaching conversations can be structured around the three broader EIL facets (self, others, and context), allowing students to explore their leadership identity and impact. The individual EIL capacities can also help students hone more specific skills, such as initiative, emotional self-control, or conflict management. By identifying specific EIL capacities for growth, educators help students establish intentional goals and engage in a continuous cycle of reflection, deliberate practice, observation, and feedback.

## Training and Development

Campus activities educators can use EIL as a foundation and guiding framework for training and development, offering structured learning experiences that support students' leadership development. The model's flexibility allows for various training formats such as:

- Workshops and In-services: Monthly or quarterly sessions can focus on introducing and practicing EIL capacities, such as building relationships, inspiring others, or adaptability.
- Retreats and Leadership Conferences: EIL can serve as a guiding curriculum for intensive, immersive experiences, allowing students to engage deeply with the model and apply it to situations they are experiencing through their campus involvement.
- Ongoing Leadership Development Programs: Multi-session programs can progressively introduce EIL facets and capacities, encouraging students to apply their learning over time. For example, a series of programs could begin with a unit on *self,* then units on *others* and *context.* Alternatively, mini-EIL tidbits or opportunities for reflection could be incorporated into weekly meetings.

Using EIL as a framework, educators can create intentional learning opportunities that help students connect their campus involvement experiences to broader leadership development goals.

## Supporting the Health of Student Organizations

Student organizations frequently undergo transitions, whether due to leadership turnover, shifts in priorities, or external challenges. EIL provides a structured approach to navigate change for student leaders and their advisors. At the outset of a change process, educators can help student

leaders leverage capacities such as initiative, achievement, and building teams to foster engagement and buy-in from their peers. During times of uncertainty or resistance, guiding students to develop optimism, conflict management, and skills to diagnose group dynamics can be valuable to the individual students and the group. Helping students focus on the three facets of EIL and relevant capacities can, in turn, help student organizations better manage transitions and sustain momentum.

## Supporting and Developing Teams

Campus activities offerings often encompass student teams, from event planning committees to executive boards of student organizations. EIL offers a valuable framework for enhancing team dynamics and performance. Educators can facilitate team development by using EIL to:

- Guide visioning discussions about shared leadership values and team priorities.
- Support goal setting and action planning based on EIL capacities.
- Encourage ongoing reflection and evaluation to reinforce learning and improve team performance.
- Have students assess their EIL strengths and areas of growth and/or administer the *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership for Students: Inventory* (Shankman et al., 2015b) to help team members assess their collective strengths and areas for growth.

By grounding team development in EIL, campus activities educators can empower students to take ownership of the team, work collaboratively, engage thoughtfully in the leadership process, and build more effective and cohesive student-led initiatives.

## Conclusion

By integrating the EIL model into campus activities programs, educators can create meaningful opportunities for students to develop self-awareness, foster relationships, and navigate the complexities of group dynamics. EIL provides a structured yet flexible framework to support students as they navigate their collegiate experience and prepare for future leadership roles and experiences. Embedding EIL principles into the applied learning experience of campus activities enables students' experiences to extend beyond participation to become meaningful opportunities for leadership, personal development, career readiness, and lifelong learning. Further, EIL provides a valuable framework to strengthen student programs, organizations, and teams. By intentionally focusing their work and centering student learning through applied experiences, campus activities professionals enrich students' co-curricular experiences and fulfill the broader mission of higher education—cultivating lifelong learners who can apply their knowledge and skills to make a meaningful impact in their communities and beyond.

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