

Spiritual Formation as a Method of Leadership Training:  
A Case Study at Pepperdine University

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### Abstract

Dallas Willard, Professor of Philosophy and Christian spiritual formation at USC, was known to define spiritual formation not as the summation of one's good works and talents, but rather as a continual pursuit in modeling the character of Jesus Christ. This understanding of spiritual formation was applied to a group of first year students at Pepperdine University who were selected as students with high potential of becoming future leaders at Pepperdine. Most training programs on campus, such as Resident Life Formation and Volunteer Center training, currently focus on teaching students lessons of what to do in their job. In Spring of 2016, a pilot training program with 12 first year students was conducted to train students to lead not from their abilities but from their identity as sons and daughters of Jesus Christ. The goal of the program was to test the theory that asking questions about identity, or who we are, is more effective in developing future leaders than asking questions about ability, or what we can do. The 12 first year students were taken through an eight-week training program with presenters from various Spiritual Life departments on campus, such as the Office of the Chaplain and the Religion Division. Students and presenters were surveyed before and after the program and asked to provide feedback on the curriculum. Ultimately, the results demonstrate the viability of a new form of training programs rooted in questions of spiritual formation.

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