

Servant Leadership and Governance Practices in Catholic Schools: A Quantitative Study of Their Influence on College Students

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study examined the influence of servant leadership and mission-aligned governance practices on student formation in Catholic higher education institutions. College students enrolled in selected Catholic colleges participated in the study through a structured survey questionnaire measuring servant leadership practices, mission-aligned governance practices, and student formation in terms of academic motivation, engagement, and values development.

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the level of leadership and governance practices, while correlation and regression analyses examined their predictive influence on student formation. Results indicated that servant leadership and mission-aligned governance were perceived at very high levels and significantly predicted student formation outcomes. The findings emphasize the importance of value-centered leadership and mission-driven governance in strengthening the formative mission of Catholic education. The study provides empirical evidence that may guide institutional leaders and policymakers in enhancing leadership development and governance practices within Catholic higher education.

Keywords: servant leadership, school governance, Catholic schools, college students, quantitative study

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Catholic higher education institutions is to combine service to the common good, moral development, and academic excellence. Leadership and governance practices that embody the Church's educational philosophy and Gospel values are essential to achieving this mission. Given this, servant leadership—which emphasizes service, humility, ethical responsibility, and the holistic development of individuals—has become a leadership style that closely reflects Catholic educational ideals (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2010).

In Catholic universities, servant leadership pushes administrators to put students' and the academic community's needs first, creating atmospheres that encourage intellectual engagement, social responsibility, and spiritual development. Mission-aligned governance, which guarantees that institutional policies, decisionmaking procedures, and administrative practices stay in line with the institution's Catholic identity and mission, is a complement to leadership (Bush, 2011). Maintaining stakeholder trust, accountability, and institutional integrity all depend heavily on effective governance.

Although leadership and governance in educational settings have been the subject of earlier research, there is currently a dearth of empirical studies examining the effects of servant leadership and mission-aligned governance on student formation in Catholic higher education. In addition to academic growth, student formation includes moral responsibility, values formation, and service. Since these views influence students' educational experiences and institutional commitment, it is crucial to comprehend how they view leadership and governance. By investigating the effects of mission-aligned governance and servant leadership on student development in Catholic colleges, this study fills this knowledge gap.

Research Purpose and Questions

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the influence of servant leadership and mission-aligned governance on student formation in Catholic colleges. Specifically, the study seeks to assess students' perceptions of leadership and governance practices and determine their implications for students' academic, moral, and social development.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of servant leadership practices as perceived by college students in Catholic colleges?
2. What is the level of mission-aligned governance practices as perceived by college students?
3. To what extent does servant leadership influence student formation in Catholic colleges?
4. To what extent does mission-aligned governance influence student formation?
5. Is there a significant relationship between servant leadership, mission-aligned governance, and student formation?

Research Design

This study employed a **quantitative descriptive–correlational research design** to examine the relationships between servant leadership, mission-aligned governance, and student formation in Catholic higher education institutions. The design enabled the objective measurement of students' perceptions and the statistical analysis of predictive relationships among the study variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted in selected Catholic colleges that integrate faith-based values, leadership formation, and mission-oriented governance. A total of **100 college students** participated using a convenience sampling technique based on accessibility and willingness to participate. Respondents represented different academic programs and year levels to capture diverse perspectives on institutional leadership and governance.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured researcher-developed questionnaire composed of three constructs:

1. Servant Leadership Practices
2. Mission-Aligned Governance Practices
3. Student Formation

All items were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The instrument underwent pilot testing to establish clarity and internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

Data Collection

Permission was obtained from institutional authorities prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and ethical standards such as informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were strictly observed. Questionnaires were administered through printed copies and online platforms.

Data Analysis: Survey Questionnaire

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to determine the level of servant leadership, mission-aligned governance, and student formation. Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships among variables, while multiple linear regression determined the predictive influence of servant leadership and governance practices on student formation. Statistical analyses were performed using appropriate statistical software.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the study on servant leadership and mission-aligned governance in Catholic colleges and discusses the findings in relation to existing theories and empirical studies on leadership, governance, and student formation.

Reliability of the Instrument

The internal consistency of the research instrument was examined using Cronbach's alpha. As shown in Table 1, all constructs demonstrated excellent reliability, exceeding the acceptable threshold of .70 recommended for social science research.

Table 1 Reliability Coefficients of the Study Variables

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Servant Leadership	8	0.982	Excellent
Mission-Aligned Governance	8	0.984	Excellent
Student Formation	8	0.986	Excellent

The results show that the questionnaire items consistently measured servant leadership, mission-aligned governance, and student formation. High reliability values align with prior research employing modified servant leadership and governance instruments (Liden et al., 2008; Eva et al., 2019).

Level of Servant Leadership, Mission-Aligned Governance, and Student Formation

Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the level of servant leadership, mission-aligned governance, and student formation as perceived by college students.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Servant Leadership	4.31	0.94
Mission-Aligned Governance	4.33	0.94
Student Formation	4.34	0.94
Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation

The results show that servant leadership and mission-aligned governance were seen as very important, as was student formation. These results suggest that Catholic colleges do a good job of putting into practice leadership and governance that is based on service, ethics, and the mission of the institution.

This finding corroborates Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership theory, which posits that leadership rooted in service fosters follower development and well-being. In Catholic institutions, leadership is fundamentally values-based, embodying Gospel principles such as humility, compassion, and service. Research shows that servant leadership creates ethical environments and learning spaces that are helpful (Liden et al., 2008; Eva et al., 2019).

In the same way, Bush (2011) says that good governance in schools should reflect the values and mission of the school. This is also true of the very high level of mission-aligned governance. The governance structures in Catholic colleges seem to make sure that things are clear, that people are held accountable, and that they are morally responsible. This strengthens the identity of the institution and the trust of the students (Shattock, 2014).

Relationship Between Leadership, Governance, and Student Formation

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship among servant leadership, mission-aligned governance, and student formation.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Servant Leadership	—		
2. Mission-Aligned Governance	0.958***	—	
3. Student Formation	0.964***	0.959***	—

** $p < .001$

The results indicate **very strong positive relationships** between servant leadership and student formation, as well as between mission-aligned governance and student formation. These findings suggest that students' academic motivation, moral development, and engagement are strongly influenced by leadership and governance practices in Catholic colleges.

Astin's (1993) theory of student involvement says that the institutional environment has a big impact on student outcomes. These results support that idea. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also said that the way leaders act and the culture of an organization have a big effect on how students think and feel. In Catholic higher education, where leadership and governance are integrated with the mission, such robust relationships are theoretically anticipated.

Predictive Influence of Servant Leadership and Mission-Aligned Governance on Student Formation

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which servant leadership and mission-aligned governance predict student formation.

Table 4 Regression Analysis Predicting Student Formation

Predictor	β	t	p
Servant Leadership	0.54	4.44	< .001
Mission-Aligned Governance	0.45	3.77	< .001

Model Summary:

$$R^2 = 0.946$$

$$\text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.943$$

$$F(2, 46) = 401.30, p < .001$$

The regression model accounts for 94.6% of the variance in student formation, demonstrating a robust predictive relationship. Servant leadership and mission-aligned governance both had a big effect on how students formed, but servant leadership was the stronger predictor.

This finding corroborates Greenleaf's (1977) claim that servant leadership is pivotal to personal growth and moral development. Leaders who put service and doing the right thing first have a big impact on schools. Eva et al. (2019) likewise discovered that servant leadership is a robust predictor of follower well-being, engagement, and ethical development.

The fact that mission-aligned governance is a strong predictor supports Bush's (2011) and Shattock's (2014) claims that governance structures that are in line with the institution's mission improve educational outcomes. In Catholic colleges, governance practices make sure that decisions made by leaders always reflect Catholic values. This helps students grow as people.

Multicollinearity and Model Assumptions

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for servant leadership and mission-aligned governance were both 12.18, which means that the predictors were very closely related. But this result makes sense in theory because leadership and governance in Catholic institutions are always connected to the mission. Even though the VIF values were high, both predictors were still statistically significant, which means that the estimates were stable.

This condition exemplifies the interconnectedness of leadership and governance within faith-based institutions, rather than mere statistical redundancy, a stance corroborated by systems theory in educational leadership (Bush, 2011; Bryk et al., 2015).

Overall Discussion

This study's results offer robust empirical evidence that servant leadership and mission-aligned governance are essential factors influencing student development in Catholic colleges. Service-oriented leadership and governance that aligns with the institution's mission work together to shape students' academic motivation, moral values, and involvement.

These results add to the body of research on educational leadership by applying servant leadership and governance research to Catholic higher education and showing that student formation is a key outcome of leadership. The study emphasizes the significance of values-driven leadership and mission-oriented governance in preserving the formative mission of Catholic colleges.

Proposed Program Based on the Findings

Program Title: SERVE-FORM Program (Servant Leadership and Mission-Aligned Governance for Student Formation) Program Rationale

The study's results showed that people have a very high opinion of servant leadership and mission-aligned governance in Catholic colleges, and these things are very good at predicting how students will develop. Servant leadership emerged as the most significant predictor, demonstrating that leadership practices rooted in service, ethical conduct, and consideration for others are essential in influencing students' academic motivation, moral development, and social involvement. Similarly, governance that is in line with the mission was found to have a

big impact on student formation. This shows how important it is to have governance structures and policies that are open and honest and reflect Catholic values.

Catholic colleges are responsible for more than just teaching students. They are also responsible for helping students grow in all areas of their lives according to the school's religious mission. So, leadership and governance are important factors that affect the climate of an institution and the experiences of its students. The study found strong predictive relationships between leadership and governance practices, which shows that there is a need for a structured and long-term program that intentionally strengthens these practices and makes sure they stay in line with student formation goals.

In light of these findings, the SERVE–FORM Program (Servant Leadership and Mission-Aligned Governance for Student Formation) is put forward. The program's goal is to turn empirical evidence into real actions by administrators by promoting servant leadership, improving governance practices that are in line with the Catholic mission, and keeping holistic student formation initiatives going. Catholic colleges can make sure that leadership and governance continue to help students who are academically strong, morally sound, and socially responsible by making these practices a part of their institutions.

General Objective

To strengthen student formation in Catholic colleges through the intentional enhancement of servant leadership practices and mission-aligned governance.

Specific Objectives

1. To improve the servant leadership skills of school and academic leaders based on Catholic values and moral leadership.
2. To make governance practices stronger that support openness, responsibility, and alignment with the institution's Catholic mission.
3. To encourage administrators, faculty, and students to work together and share responsibility in making decisions for the institution.
4. To keep holistic student formation programs going that encourage moral growth, social responsibility, and academic success.
5. To help students become servant leaders through community service, leadership training, and other activities that get them involved in their communities.
6. To set up a system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of leadership, governance, and formation programs and make sure they keep getting better.

Table: SERVE–FORM Program Framework

Key Result / Finding	Program Component	Objectives	Activities / Strategies	Responsible Persons	Expected Outcomes
Very high servant leadership practices significantly predict student formation	Servant Leadership Formation for Administrators	Enhance servant leadership competencies aligned with Catholic values	Leadership formation seminars, reflective retreats, leadership mentoring	School administrators, campus ministry, leadership trainers	Strengthened servant leadership behaviors among administrators

<p>Missionaligned governance significantly influences student formation</p>	<p>Mission-Aligned Governance Review</p>	<p>Ensure governance policies reflect Catholic mission and student welfare</p>	<p>Policy review workshops, governance audits, stakeholder consultations</p>	<p>School administrators, governing board, faculty representatives</p>	<p>Transparent and missionconsistent governance practices</p>
<p>Strong relationship between leadership, governance, and student formation</p>	<p>Integrated Leadership–Governance Dialogue</p>	<p>Foster collaboration among leaders, faculty, and students</p>	<p>Leadership forums, town hall meetings, student representation in councils</p>	<p>Administrators, faculty leaders, student leaders</p>	<p>Increased trust, shared decisionmaking, and student engagement</p>
<p>High student formation outcomes (academic, moral, and social development)</p>	<p>Holistic Student Formation Program</p>	<p>Sustain and enhance holistic student formation</p>	<p>Values formation seminars, service-learning projects, leadership camps</p>	<p>Student affairs office, campus ministry, faculty advisers</p>	<p>Enhanced moral values, social responsibility, and leadership skills</p>
<p>Leadership inspires service among students</p>	<p>Student Servant Leadership Development</p>	<p>Cultivate servant leadership among students</p>	<p>Peer leadership training, community outreach, service immersion programs</p>	<p>Student leaders, campus ministry, community partners</p>	<p>Students demonstrate serviceoriented leadership and civic engagement</p>
<p>Need for sustainability and continuous improvement</p>	<p>Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism</p>	<p>Assess program effectiveness and guide improvements</p>	<p>Annual surveys, feedback mechanisms, leadership performance review</p>	<p>Quality assurance office, research committee</p>	<p>Continuous improvement of leadership, governance, and formation programs</p>

Program Impact

- Supports servant leadership as the main way to shape students • Improves trust in institutions and governance that is in line with the mission
- Keeps student formation at very high levels
- Turns research results into actions that institutions can take

The study's results suggest a program called SERVE–FORM that would use servant leadership and mission-aligned governance to help students grow. The program's main goals are to develop leaders, align governance with Catholic educational mission and values, and help students grow in all areas of their lives.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This study looked at how servant leadership and mission-aligned governance affect the growth of students in Catholic colleges. The results showed that college students had a very high opinion of both servant leadership and mission-aligned governance. This means that Catholic schools do a good job of embodying leadership and governance practices that are based on service, moral responsibility, and the school's mission. More importantly, the results showed that servant leadership and mission-aligned governance are both strong and positive predictors of student formation, with servant leadership being the strongest predictor.

The strong links between leadership, governance, and student formation show how important values-based leadership and mission-centered governance are in Catholic higher education. Leadership practices marked by humility, compassion, and service, alongside governance structures that reflect Catholic identity, significantly enhance students' academic motivation, moral development, and social engagement. These results support the ideas behind servant leadership and student development theories. They show that the environment of an institution is very important for the overall development of students.

The study offers empirical validation for the amalgamation of servant leadership and mission-aligned governance as fundamental catalysts for student development in Catholic colleges. The results emphasize the necessity of maintaining and institutionalizing leadership and governance practices that align with the Catholic educational mission. By doing this, Catholic colleges and universities can keep turning out graduates who are smart, morally sound, and dedicated to service and social responsibility.

This study offers substantial insights into leadership, governance, and student development in Catholic colleges; however, it suggests several avenues for future research. First, subsequent research may utilize mixed-methods or qualitative frameworks to obtain a more profound understanding of the implementation of servant leadership and mission-aligned governance in everyday institutional practices, as well as how students perceive these experiences. This study's findings could be better understood through interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies.

Second, subsequent research could broaden the participant pool to encompass faculty members, administrators, and governing board representatives, thereby offering a more holistic view of leadership and governance practices. Comparative analyses between Catholic and non-Catholic higher education institutions may be undertaken to investigate disparities in leadership methodologies and student development outcomes.

Third, subsequent research may employ structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze more intricate relationships among leadership, governance, institutional culture, and student outcomes. SEM would enable researchers to examine mediation and moderation effects, thereby further validating the integrated leadership-governance model proposed in this study.

Finally, it is suggested that longitudinal studies be conducted to investigate the enduring effects of servant leadership and mission-aligned governance on student development and outcomes following graduation. Following graduates over time may yield significant insights into the impact of leadership and governance practices on professional conduct, ethical decision-making, and enduring dedication to service.

Practical Recommendations for School Admonitors, Heads and Trainers:

Based on the findings of this study, the following practical recommendations are proposed to strengthen servant leadership, mission-aligned governance, and student formation in Catholic colleges.

1. Make servant leadership training a part of the institution

School leaders and administrators should make servant leadership a core way of leading on purpose. To improve skills like making ethical decisions, being empathetic, being humble, and being a service-oriented leader, there

should be regular leadership formation programs, retreats, and workshops. By including servant leadership principles in leadership development programs, administrators will always act in ways that help students grow.

2. Make sure that governance policies are in line with the institution's mission.

Administrators should check and update governance policies on a regular basis to make sure they are in line with the Catholic mission and values of the school. Policies, strategic plans, and administrative decisions that clearly state mission-driven goals encourage openness, responsibility, and moral duty. Governance structures should show not only how well things work, but also how much they care about students' well-being and moral responsibility.

3. Make participatory decision-making stronger

School leaders should encourage inclusive and participatory governance by getting faculty, staff, and students involved in making decisions. Setting up advisory councils, having students on committees, and holding regular consultative meetings all help stakeholders feel like they have a stake in the school and that they are responsible for it.

4. Combine leadership and student development programs

Administrators should make sure that leadership programs are directly connected to programs that help students grow. Academic leaders, student affairs offices, and campus ministry must work together to create programs that combine academic success, value formation, and service-learning. This kind of integration strengthens the role of leadership and governance in shaping the overall growth of students.

5. Help students learn how to be servant leaders

School leaders should give students chances to learn how to be servant leaders by offering leadership training, service-learning projects, and activities that get them involved in the community. Encouraging student leadership based on service builds responsibility, empathy, and social awareness, which are important goals of Catholic education.

6. Set up ways to keep an eye on and evaluate things

To find out how well leadership, governance, and student formation programs are working, administrators should set up regular monitoring and evaluation systems. Regular feedback from students and other interested parties, along with evaluations based on data, makes it possible to keep getting better and make smart choices.

7. Keep an institutional culture based on values

In their daily interactions and administrative work, school leaders should always model and promote Catholic values. Administrators and heads can create an environment that supports both academic success and the overall growth of students by fostering a culture of values based on service, integrity, and respect.

Conclusion

Conclusions are made in light of the study's findings:

The study finds that college students have a very high opinion of servant leadership practices in Catholic colleges. This shows that school administrators and academic leaders always show leadership behaviors that include service, humility, ethical behavior, and concern for the overall growth of students. These kinds of leadership show how Catholic education is based on values and help create a supportive and educational environment at the school.

The results show that people think very highly of mission-aligned governance practices in Catholic colleges. People think that the way the institution is run and the way decisions are made are clear, fair, and in line with the Catholic mission of the school. This means that governance in Catholic colleges does a good job of protecting the integrity of the school, holding people accountable, and looking out for the students' well-being.

The study's conclusion is that servant leadership has a big and strong effect on how students develop. Servant leadership was the best predictor of student formation. This shows that leadership based on service and moral responsibility is very important for shaping students' academic motivation, values, and engagement. This shows how important leadership is in shaping Catholic higher education.

The results show that governance that is in line with the mission also has a big impact on how students develop. Governance practices that are in line with the Catholic mission help students trust the school, grow morally, and have a better overall educational experience. This shows how important it is to have governance structures that are not only effective but also based on ethics and the organization's mission.

The study finds that there is a strong and significant positive link between servant leadership, mission-aligned governance, and student formation. In Catholic colleges, leadership and governance work together to create an environment that supports the overall growth of students. The strong connections seen confirm that leadership and governance work together to fulfill the mission of Catholic higher education.

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