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**Overview**

The purpose of this document is to clarify the core tenets and key indicators of excellence of our 9-12 Foundations of Leadership course.

**Alignment to our Mission**

Nationally, only about 10% of students from low-income families will earn a bachelor’s degree by age 26. We refuse to accept this perpetuation of inequality. Our mission at Achievement First is to provide all of our students with the academic and character skills they need to graduate from top colleges, to succeed in a competitive world and to serve as the next generation of leaders in our communities. Beyond content knowledge and cognitive strategies, being college ready includes other abilities frequently untaught in schools that help students succeed despite the unknowable yet inevitable challenges of college and life. **Foundations of Leadership will prepare scholars to be successful, independent young adults, equipped with the tools to succeed academically, socially and emotionally in high school, college and life.**

**College and Career Readiness Defined**

As articulated in David Conley’s framework in *Getting Ready for College, Careers, and the Common Core*, the following organizing terms are used throughout the profile as an organizing schema for college proficiencies:

* **Key Cognitive Strategies and Practices:** “…the ways of thinking that are necessary for postsecondary-level work (Conley p. 55)”
* **Key Learning Skills and Techniques:** The habits or behaviors that students must “master [in order] to succeed in most academic courses and… to continue to learn once they have concluded their formal education (Conley p. 56)”
* **Key Content Knowledge:** “…the foundational content and big ideas from core subjects that all students must know well (Conley p. 55)”
* **Key Transition Knowledge and Skills:** The knowledge and skills necessary, “to navigate successfully the transition to life beyond high school. This is information that is not equally accessible to all students (Conley p. 56)”

The order of the sections reflects the research findings about what it takes for students to be college ready. Key cognitive strategies come before content knowledge, and tasks that assess the key cognitive strategies come before more traditional assessments. This is because cognitive strategies and key learning skills and techniques are as important to a college student’s success as the content knowledge they acquired while in school (Conley p. 58). Furthermore, students’ ability to apply the key cognitive strategies and disciplinary practices to novel tasks is the best predictor available for college and career success.

**Foundations of Leadership – A New Direction for the College Readiness Seminar**

Previously titled “College Readiness Seminar”, this course is now “Foundations of Leadership”. The name change is important for several reasons.

* *Inspire and motivate:* As Marianne Williamson famously said, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.” Helping our scholars to see their power to change their lives and the lives of others will empower students to see their locus of control, both in and out of school. While the long-term goal of college may motivate some, not all of our scholars are motivated by the intangible, distant vision of college as a key to success. Focusing on leadership development has many applications and can fit the vision of the vast majority of our scholars in their current developmental stage. Whether in the classroom, on the soccer pitch, in band, at church, at a job or within the family, there are almost limitless ways that students can connect to being a leader. “If you think the mission doesn’t matter, try telling a ninth-grader that she’s learning about cell mutation. Then tell the same ninth-grader that she’s figuring out how to stop cancer in its tracks. See which topic makes her eyes light up.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* *Focus on strengths, not deficits:* At the foundation of this approach is a belief that each person has unique talents, skills and life experiences in addition to unmet knowledge, skill and habit needs. Meeting each of our scholars where they are and focusing on the academic, emotional and social strengths that they have and that they want to further develop allows our team to focus on growth over deficits. Focusing on the development of leadership skills starts from the assumption that everyone has the capacity and abilities to be a leader and that, through hard work, each person can lead in his/her unique way.
* *Increase admissibility:* Selective colleges, opportunity programs (e.g. EOP, HEOP, SEEK) and scholarships (e.g. Posse) are looking at students’ leadership experience and potential as a component of holistic application review. Intentionally building our students’ opportunities to engage in leadership opportunities and develop their leadership skills will make our scholars more competitive in the college application process.

**Foundations of Leadership – Student Framing**

Our messaging to students matters. Here is one example of framing the course in a way that aims to inspire scholars:

* Who will find a cure for cancer? Design the solution to our dependence on oil? Teach the next generation of world leaders? Run the World Bank and the United Nations? Someone sitting in a high school class at this minute. This course is designed to help prepare you for the responsibility of leading your family, your school, your community, your country and the world.

**College and Career Readiness in Foundations of Leadership**

“I am increasingly convinced that educators are never going to see the types of improvement in student learning that they desire and that policy makers seek if students are not able to take more ownership of their learning and to connect their schooling to their goals and ambitions,”[[2]](#footnote-2) states David Conley at the outset of his seminal work *Getting Ready for College, Careers, and the Common* Core. Whether called noncognitive skills, social and emotional skills, life skills or other, numerous studies prove that these abilities are a key predictor of progress in K-12 as well as post-secondary education. For long-term success beyond our walls, students need to master these additional skills and mindsets while also learning to navigate the complex college application and enrollment process. Foundations of Leadership focuses on increasing student ownership of learning while helping scholars develop the future-oriented self focused on long-term goals and ambitions by focusing on three of the four college and career readiness keys as defined by David Conley: 1) *Key Cognitive Strategies and Practices,* 2) *Key Learning Skills & Techniques* and, 2) *Key Transition Knowledge and Skills*. First, FoL will equip scholars with the mindsets, knowledge and skills to be successful in high school, college and life. To succeed in meeting this goal, the class has been structured to mimic a college course – meeting twice per week but expecting independent work to be completed outside of class time. While the amount of homework given must take into consideration AF’s extended school day, some homework is still essential for teaching scholars to independently manage social, personal, and academic demands. Second, FoL will position an increasing number of scholars to be able to matriculate to more competitive colleges where they will receive better academic, social, emotional and financial support and will thus be more likely to graduate. This will be accomplished by scholars applying their growth and goal-setting on achieving short-term goals that will help them reach their long-term goals, e.g. increasing GPA.

**Program Tenets:**

***Cultivate a College Going Identity –***

Throughout this course, students will explore multiple facets of their identity, including their membership in different identity groups, and discuss how elements of these identities will enrich their ability to succeed in college. According to Savitz-Romer and Bouffarfd in their seminal book, *Ready, Willing and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success*, forming a college going identity involves five cyclical steps: envisioning oneself as a college goer; believing in one’s ability to succeed; aiming for goals that matter; planning, organizing and self-regulating; and, marshalling internal and external psychosocial resources. Helping students to form a college going identity is the umbrella under which the rest of our course coalesces. Students will define who they are now, who they want to be in the future, and will be supported in their implementation of their plans to get there. Students will develop tools to determine their current and future selves through reflection, planning and goal setting that will serve them both in high school and, perhaps more importantly, in the less structured, higher-stakes world of college. They will also explore some of the challenges unique to the experiences of first-generation college students, and further develop the relationship-building and leadership skills that are so important to overcoming these challenges and graduating college. The focus on identity will further develop students’ intrinsic motivation to reach their goals, driving students towards higher GPAs that will open more college choices.

***Take Ownership of Learning for High School, College and Life Success –***

“Success in the future will be much more a function not simply of what people have learned but of what they are capable of learning.”[[3]](#footnote-3) In college, and in the work world for the rest of their lives, students will not succeed by relying on the teacher to drive learning. Instead, students will be expected to tackle complex tasks, texts, problem sets and papers on their own with little to no guidance, and will be expected to persevere when they make mistakes. By teaching our students the skills needed to be successful with self-directed learning, we are teaching skills that they can transfer and practice in their other content areas which will lead to increased high school success. At the same time, students are learning the skills needed to be successful in college and in all career paths. “Recent research on noncognitive factors has not only suggested (noncognitive factors) importance for student academic performance but has also been used to argue that social investments in the development of these noncognitive factors would yield high payoffs in improved educational outcomes as well as reduced racial/ethnic and gender disparities in school performance and educational attainment… Teachers … play a vital role in helping students move from being passive recipients of academic content to active learners who can manage their workload, assess their progress and status, persist in difficult tasks, and develop a reliable set of strategies to master increasingly complex academic content as they proceed through school.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The need for this charge is made tangible by the experiences of our college-going alumni. “In college I fell on my face the first year because in high school everything was there for me. When I say everything I mean my teachers and support. In college it is not that easy. It was hard for me to understand that I need to self-edit my work instead of always having a teacher do it… In AF I was so complacent. In college I learned to be self-reliant,” shared one graduate of Brooklyn High School. Helping students learn these skills will provide two major benefits. First, students will do better in high school, thereby increasing their competitiveness for more selective colleges where they are more likely to graduate. Second, students will have a broader skill set to succeed in whatever college they matriculate to. Students will continue to learn what a GPA is and how colleges will view their GPA; in the revised curriculum students will build upon this foundation to internalize their locus of control over their GPA. Teaching learning skills (self-regulation, goal setting, time and task management, perseverance, resilience, reflection and others) will empower students to control their personal outcomes.

***Develop College to Career Connection and Long-Term Vision –***

Once the strong supports, systems and scaffolding in place at our high schools is no longer a daily support to students, our alumni must rely more heavily on their intrinsic motivation and their ability to make decisions towards reaching long-term goals to be successful. Too many of scholars in our first graduating classes matriculated to college but have not developed the long-term life vision and accompanying intrinsic motivation to sustain them through the most challenging aspects of college including academic struggles, financial obstacles, classism and racism. The tools necessary to overcome these obstacles include a strong sense of self and purpose. This shift will help us to push students so that they are no longer aiming to land in college (college as a destination) but aiming for a life path which includes college as a step along a longer career path. “There’s a difference between wanting to go to college and someone telling you they want you to go to college. Because when you go to college for reasons you don’t know why, then you drop out. Because you don’t know why you’re there. You’re going for someone else. It’s like a promise you’re keeping that’s not yours. It’s not your own promise.”[[5]](#footnote-5) We will help students get to this longer view by focusing on strengths, not on deficits to build students’ confidence in their ability to conquer the myriad known and unknown challenges that will arise in high school, college and life.

***Become Critical Consumers of Post-Secondary Options –***

All colleges are not equal. With over 4,000 degree-granting institutions in the United States, many of whom spend lavishly on marketing whether they graduate 10% of students or 90% of students, the landscape can be overwhelming and confusing, especially for students who will be the first in their family to graduate from college. To make informed decisions about their future, both now while they are within our walls and later when they are in college, students must learn how to critically assess the available options and how to best position themselves to have as many options as possible. This tenet is a key to one of the core strategies on Team College: we will increase college success rates for our scholars by helping students matriculate to colleges that will provide the academic, social, emotional and financial support to support success.

***Navigate the Complex Application and Matriculation Process –***

College choice matters. Successfully navigating the application and matriculation process is a key step in helping our students move onto a college that will help them to succeed and graduate. Demystifying the privileged information necessary to understand how to apply, matriculate and succeed in college is critically important because the majority of our students will be first-generation[[6]](#footnote-6) college goers. The skills that students learn with us in high school are the same skills they will need to navigate the complex bureaucracies they will face in college and beyond. As so much rides on this process, it is imperative that students have multiple at-bats with high stakes application processes and the various steps and components needed to submit a highly competitive application. At bats will be via the summer programs application process. Students will complete an application process[[7]](#footnote-7) that will offer at-bats with personal statements, program research, demonstrated interest, applying to a reach, target and safety program and the experience of acceptance and rejection. A significant part of this work will focus on improving both students’ ability to write narrative non-fiction (personal statements as well as college and scholarship essays) and our staff’s ability to support an increasing number of highly competitive scholars as defined by GPA and SAT scores.

***Learn Personal Finance Skills and the Ability to Navigate Financial Aid –***

Both our internal alumni data and national data make clear that financial obstacles play a major role in the low graduation rate for students from low-income families. While finances will continue to be an obstacle that many students will face, we will mitigate the obstacle by equipping students with the specific knowledge needed to navigate financing a college education and the more general knowledge needed to make informed financial decisions generally. Our scholars must understand not only what types of loans exist, but what types of debt are worth taking on, how to build equity for the future and how today’s decisions impact tomorrow. A deeper understanding of personal finances will help students understand the long-term benefit of investing in their education instead of stopping out partway through college to pursue an option that provides short-term benefits only.

**Program Outcomes:**

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| **Foundations of Leadership Program Outcomes** |
| ***Cultivate a College Going Identity[[8]](#footnote-8):***   * Cultivate a **future-oriented identity** by developing post-secondary aspirations and **goals that are consistent with and help to integrate the other dimensions of one’s identity;** * Develop expectations that are based on beliefs about one’s ability to **go and succeed in college.**   ***Take Ownership of Learning for High School, College and Life Success Practice and Internalize:***   * Develop self-knowledge as a learner to **be capable of and responsible for learning;** * Foster **self-efficacy**, the belief in the ability to accomplish a specific task or goal and to persist in the face of obstacles, by providing students with opportunities to **set goals, work towards their attainment and reflect** on both successes and failures; * Develop ability to **manage thoughts, emotions, and behaviors** in the service of attaining goals.   ***Develop College to Career Connection and Long-Term Vision:***   * Develop a **vision for the future** based on potential **careers of interest** to guide **school to life connections;** * Empower students to translate their academic foundation into **concrete, actionable steps** to reach a **vision of long-term professional success.**   ***Become Critical Consumers of Post-Secondary Options:***   * Develop ability as a critical consumer to **differentiate both the glaring and the subtle differences between colleges;** * Ensure the constant development of **skeptical eye** through **research and communication with various stakeholders**.   ***Navigate the Complex Application and Matriculation Process:***   * Cultivate skills to submit top-quality applications that **highlight personal strengths and unique characteristics** to increase chances of acceptance to selective **programs and colleges with strong records of student support and graduation**; * Develop awareness of the **scope, scale and significance of the life transition** to be undertaken post high school and prepare to **overcome the numerous known and unknown obstacles** to be inevitably faced throughout the transition.   ***Learn Personal Finance Skills and the Ability to Navigate Financial Aid:***   * Develop a **long-term financial view** that recognizes the benefits of **short-term sacrifice for long-term gain;** * Build skills to make **informed financial decisions**. |

**Foundations of Leadership at a Glance**

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| **Purpose and Schedule** | **Intellectual Preparation and Assessment** | **Key Indicators of Excellence** |
| **Purpose:** Students master the tools to succeed academically, socially and emotionally in high school, college and life.  **Schedule:**  9-11:  52-60 min/day  2 days/week  12:  52-60 min/day  4 days/week | **Unit-Level Preparation:** The Scope and Sequence and units are developed at the Network level by Course Leads and members of Team College. The units are topically or thematically based and align with the standards and high-quality complex texts appropriate for the grade level. The texts chosen for each unit serve as the anchor for the standards as well as for the Essential Questions, but aim to expose students to diversity in authorial styles, topics and perspectives as students explore big ideas and new worlds.  **Lesson Planning:** Teachers write their own lesson plans modeled on shared, annotated exemplars. Prior to writing lessons, FoL teachers must read and unpack the text(s) and unit overview. Using specific guidance provided in FOI document that allows for appropriate differences by lesson types, teachers will plan lessons that allow students to grapple with the text and that drive toward the unit goals and performance tasks. Teachers submit lesson plans for feedback to their dean/coach, and adjust plans based on feedback.  Each plan aims to include an intervention and an extension, specific to student needs.    The Unit Overview is a recommendation of how one could go about teaching a unit on a specific genre or topic. Teachers and Deans should use these documents as guidance and as a foundation for planning, but should make decisions about specific TDQs, pacing, and (in rare instances) texts based on student needs.  **Assessment:** Students will consistently be formally and informally assessed throughout CRS class.   * Interim: IAs will be administered to determine student ability to transfer skills and habits developed during CRS classes. * Unit: The culminating unit assessment will be produced by the teacher and used to wrap up the unit and assess student mastery of content and knowledge goals. The culminating unit assessment may be different for each unit, but will often include at least one of the following: a multiple choice and open response assessment, extended written synthesis task, project, or presentation. * Daily: Students should be assessed daily on their mastery of content and skills related to the AIM for the day. For a skill based aim, the daily assessment should be a skill performance with a clear rubric containing Criteria for Success. For a content knowledge heavy aim, scholars should complete a written exit ticket demonstrating their understanding and mastery of the content verbally. Teachers should grade these exit tickets daily and provide feedback. This is especially important for teachers to understand and address student misconceptions. | **Identity Development:** Our first goal is to help students develop their own college going identity and sense of self-efficacy. Teachers will help students develop both through repeated goal setting, planning, monitoring and reflection processes.  **Student Empowerment:** Empowering students to see themselves as leaders of their school, their family and community will give us the context for teaching students the skills and mindsets to be successful in both secondary and post-secondary education while also helping students further refine their passions and ultimate motives for going to college.  **Feedback:** We want students to see feedback as an opportunity to grow rather than a critique of the self. This manifests itself in our theory around feedback, that we as teachers are not providing students with solutions, but are instead using guided questioning to help students improve their own ability to plan and execute actionable steps towards completing goals.  **Students Do the Heavy Lifting:** All students must be actively listening and participating through the use of high engagement strategies. Students develop a high standard of coherence, actively seeking to understand when comprehension breaks down. Teachers hold all students accountable for grappling with the ideas of the class and sharing their ideas orally and in writing.  **Questions Worth Asking:** Questions posed to students are questions “worth” asking. Teachers thoughtfully create scaffolded TDQs and rely heavily on these questions rather than spending the majority of time focused on ensuring literal comprehension. Also, the text is enhanced through questioning rather than overwhelmed by questions. More is not necessarily better in this case.  **Research:** Students develop college-ready research skills by engaging in shorter and less formal research tasks, as well as lengthier and more formalized independent research  **Horizontal Alignment**: Opportunities for horizontal alignment - particularly study skills alignment in students other core content classes – are leveraged to increase cohesion across the school day and year as well as to put into practice theoretical skills learned in CRS class.  **Content and skill instruction:** Lessons should emphasize skill instruction within the relevant content. The aim should include both the specific content and the means for demonstrating understanding of that content. i.e. SWBAT demonstrate understanding of SMART goals BY crafting three individualized goals that follow the SMART format. |

1. “Education for Innovation” by Chris Lundberg and Ken Seward in *Independent School*, Fall 2014 (Vol. 74, #1, p. 80-86) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Conley, David T. (2014). *Getting Ready for College, Careers, and the Common* Core. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Conley, *op. cit.*, p. 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. C. Farrington, M. Roderick, E. Allensworth, J. Nagaoka, T. Keyes, D. Johnson, and N. Beechum. Teaching adolescents to become learners: The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance: A critical literature review. *Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research*, 2012. p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Castleman, B.L., Arnold, K.C., & Wartman, K.L. (2012). Stemming the tide of summer melt: An experimental study of the effects of post-high school summer intervention on low-income students’ college enrollment. The Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, p.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. First-generation is defined as neither parent having earned a bachelor’s degree or higher from an accredited American college or university. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is important to note that the application completed in FoL will not replace the need for students who are matched with pre-college programs to complete an application specific to their program. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tenet and outcomes adapted from *Ready, Willing and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success* by Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne M. Bouffard [↑](#footnote-ref-8)