



The African-American Leadership Program

University dean Alan James gives CCL high marks for combining culture with a superior developmental experience.

Alan James
Dean of student development, California University

The cultural features that make The African-American Leadership Program stand out from most offerings in executive education were intriguing to Alan James, but they weren't the deciding factor in his decision. For James, dean of student development at California University in Pennsylvania, the quality of the learning experience reigned supreme.

This program is one of only a few designed exclusively for African Americans, and many participants are drawn to it because of the special modules it offers for airing and addressing career issues faced by minority professionals.

That was not a personal dynamic for James. He crosses a lot of cultural lines, and very comfortably so, in his job overseeing services aimed at enhancing the lives of the 5,500 undergraduates on his campus near Pittsburgh. "Still, I thought it would be an interesting experience. I wanted to see what it was about."

Most important, however, was the content. "The number one reason I signed up was the focus on personal awareness and growth. Part of my management development has been in the area of building relationships. I wanted to attend a program that would help me with that and improve my management style."

The curriculum contains the research, instruction, assessment, problem-solving activities, and goal setting that are common to all of the Center's core leadership development programs. A serious student of his own continuing education, James did his homework before signing up. "I looked around at leadership programs," he said. "I looked at them from a proprietary view. I looked at education models and I looked at business models. I've been to a lot of educational and training conferences. This model is the best of the lot."

"The African-American Leadership Program is a wonderful learning environment as well as being one of the best leadership experiences around. The emphasis is on self-awareness and the process of growth as well as the cultural and workplace issues that impact African-American professionals. It's a great leadership program that just happens to have an audience of African Americans."

The in-depth reflection and feedback provided through several 360-degree assessments were enlightening and welcome. "The work CCL does in this area – giving a person the opportunity to look at his life and the things he values – is outstanding. Opening yourself up to being looked at, either by yourself or your peers, in my view is a very large step for any manager."

Alumni of this program often comment on the feeling of easy camaraderie among participants, sometimes resulting in friendships and professional networking that continue long afterward. Though people in James' class represented quite a span of jobs and industries and experiences, he said "we identified with one another. It was nice to get to know those folks and hear their stories." Beyond the commonality of color, James observed, was their common desire to take away new skills and understandings that would help them prosper as leaders. "I really want to emphasize that my experience – and their experience – is not just an African-American experience, and this program recognizes that," he said. "This is a great leadership program that just happens to have an audience of African Americans."

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