

Revisiting Religare: A Thematic Analysis of Student Leadership Program Themes as Basis for A Leadership Training Design

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ABSTRACT

The study revisits the Religare student leadership program of the University of the Assumption, examining its historical themes from Academic Years 2005–2006 to 2019–2020 to guide in the development of a leadership training design. Using secondary data from souvenir programs and accomplishment reports of UACSC presidents, the study employed thematic analysis to identify recurring leadership concepts, values, and competencies embedded in program implementation. Findings revealed a progression from foundational leadership and team-building activities to values-driven, servant-oriented, and globally conscious leadership themes. The analysis further highlighted implicit alignments with Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Challenge, and Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory, demonstrating the program's potential for systematic leadership formation. Based on these insights, a structured and scaffolded leadership training design is proposed, integrating experiential learning, behavioral competencies, and values-based development to enhance student leadership across multiple levels.

Keywords: Student leadership, Religare program, thematic analysis, leadership training, servant leadership

INTRODUCTION

Student leadership development is a critical component of higher education, as institutions seek to form individuals who are not only academically competent but also ethically grounded, socially responsible, and capable of responding to complex organizational and societal challenges. Co-curricular leadership programs administered by the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) play a vital role in complementing formal academic learning by providing experiential spaces where students develop leadership competencies, values, and a sense of civic responsibility.

One such initiative is Religare, a long-standing student leadership program implemented from Academic Year 2005–2006 to 2019–2020. Initially introduced as an annual leadership and team-building activity, Religare evolved over time to include explicit themes reflecting changing leadership paradigms, institutional priorities, and societal contexts. While the first five years of the program focused primarily on foundational leadership and teamwork without articulated themes, subsequent iterations introduced thematic frameworks emphasizing values-based leadership, servant leadership, unity, resilience, global competencies, inclusivity, and networked leadership.

Despite its longevity and continued implementation, Religare has not yet been systematically examined as a cumulative leadership formation initiative. Existing documentation—such as program titles, themes, activity descriptions, and reports—remains underutilized as institutional knowledge. There is a need to revisit these materials through a scholarly lens to understand how leadership concepts have been framed over time, what leadership philosophies consistently emerge, and how these insights can inform a more intentional and sustainable leadership training design.

This study revisits the Religare student leadership program through thematic analysis of secondary data drawn from its historical implementations. Identifying recurring and evolving leadership themes, the study aims to

generate an evidence-based foundation for the development of a structured leadership training design aligned with the goals of the Office of Student Affairs. Ultimately, the study seeks to bridge institutional memory and future practice, ensuring that student leadership formation remains coherent, responsive, and developmentally grounded.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership development is a central function of higher education institutions, particularly in shaping students who are socially responsible, values-driven, and capable of contributing meaningfully to society. Contemporary leadership education emphasizes leadership as a relational, developmental, and learnable process rather than a positional role (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013). Colleges and universities therefore design co-curricular leadership programs to provide experiential learning opportunities that complement formal academic instruction. Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) argue that leadership development among college students must be intentional, reflective, and grounded in values formation. Their model positions leadership as a process that involves collaboration, ethical decision-making, and commitment to positive change. This perspective supports the use of structured leadership programs such as Religare, which serve as formative spaces where students can explore leadership identity, responsibility, and social impact. Reviews of leadership literature further affirm that effective leadership education requires continuity, reflection, and integration with institutional mission and student development goals (Rocco & Griffin, 2015).

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement provides a foundational framework for understanding how leadership development occurs through active student engagement. Astin (1999) defines involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy students devote to academic and co-curricular activities. According to this theory, students learn and develop leadership skills not merely by exposure to leadership concepts but through sustained participation in meaningful activities. The early iterations of the Religare program, which focused on leadership and team building, reflect Astin's emphasis on involvement as a key determinant of student learning and development. Leadership camps, congresses, and collaborative activities create environments where students invest time, effort, and emotional commitment—conditions that Astin identifies as essential for developmental outcomes. As Religare evolved, its increasing focus on unity, collaboration, and engagement further reinforced the role of involvement in leadership formation.

Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Challenge framework identifies five core practices of exemplary leadership: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). These practices emphasize leadership as an observable and learnable set of behaviors grounded in values and action. The themes of Religare from 2010 onward—such as “Ignite for Survival, Blaze for Leadership, Shine for Excellence,” “Breaking Boundaries, Defying Norms,” and “Surpassing Limitations Through Boundless Connections”—align closely with Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices. These themes encourage vision-driven leadership, resilience, innovation, and collective action. However, while these leadership practices were thematically present, the absence of an explicit framework limited the systematic reinforcement of these competencies across program cycles.

Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory conceptualizes leadership as an ethical commitment to serve others, prioritize community well-being, and foster personal growth (Greenleaf, 1977). In educational contexts, servant leadership emphasizes humility, empathy, stewardship, and moral responsibility—values often aligned with faith-based and mission-driven institutions. Religare's thematic emphasis on servant leadership, Christian values, unity, and service reflects Greenleaf's philosophy. Themes such as “Paving the Road Toward Servant Leadership” and those highlighting Christian values and social responsibility demonstrate an orientation toward leadership as service rather than authority. This alignment supports the use of servant leadership as a central theoretical anchor for leadership programs administered under the Office of Student Affairs.

Leadership development literature increasingly calls for integrative frameworks that combine involvement, behavioral leadership practices, and values-based leadership (Komives et al., 2013; Rocco & Griffin, 2015). Student Affairs units play a crucial role in operationalizing these frameworks through co-curricular programs that foster holistic student development. The analysis of Religare themes suggests that while leadership values and practices were consistently promoted, the absence of a unified and developmentally sequenced framework

limited long-term leadership competency building. Anchoring leadership programs in established theories such as Astin's involvement theory, Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices, and Greenleaf's servant leadership provides a strong foundation for designing intentional, sustainable, and outcomes-based leadership training initiatives.

Research Questions

1. What recurring leadership themes and concepts emerge from the Religare student leadership program based on secondary data from its previous implementations?
2. How do the identified themes align with the leadership development goals of the Office of Student Affairs?
3. What strengths and gaps can be identified in the thematic development of the Religare program?
4. How can the results of the thematic analysis inform the design of a structured leadership training program for students?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing thematic analysis to examine the leadership themes of the Religare student leadership program. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as the study sought to explore patterns, meanings, and leadership concepts embedded in historical program documentation rather than to measure variables or test hypotheses. The study specifically used document analysis of secondary data to generate insights that would inform the design of a leadership training program under the Office of Student Affairs.

Sources of Data

The primary sources of data for this study consisted of souvenir programs of the Religare student leadership activities and accomplishment reports of the University of the Assumption Central Student Council (UACSC) presidents covering Academic Years 2005–2006 to 2019–2020. The souvenir programs provided official records of program titles, themes, objectives, and session highlights, while the accomplishment reports documented leadership initiatives, activities, and outcomes related to student leadership development. These documents were selected due to their institutional credibility, accessibility, and relevance to the historical implementation of Religare.

Data Collection

Data collection involved the systematic retrieval and organization of available souvenir programs and UACSC presidents' accomplishment reports from the Office of Student Affairs and the University Library and Archives. Documents were reviewed for completeness and relevance prior to inclusion in the study. Key textual data—including program themes, session titles, stated objectives, and leadership-related narratives—were extracted and compiled into a document matrix to facilitate analysis. All documents were treated as archival records and were not altered in any manner during the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following established qualitative procedures. Initial familiarization involved repeated reading of the documents to gain an overall understanding of the leadership narratives. Codes were then generated inductively to capture recurring leadership concepts and emphases across the documents. Similar codes were grouped to form broader themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness. The final themes were interpreted in relation to established leadership theories and the leadership development goals of the Office of Student Affairs. The results of the thematic analysis served as the empirical basis for the proposed leadership training design.

RESULTS

Table 1 Evolution of Religare Themes and Leadership Focus (2005-2020)

Religare Year	Program Theme	Emerging Leadership Concepts
2005–2006	1st Annual Leadership & Team Building	Basic leadership orientation, teamwork
2006–2007	2nd Annual Leadership & Team Building	Collaboration, group dynamics
2007–2008	3rd Annual Leadership & Team Building	Leadership fundamentals
2008–2009	4th Annual Leadership & Team Building	Organizational skills
2009–2010	5th Annual Leadership & Team Building & 1st Students’ Congress	Student representation, participatory leadership
2010–2011	Ignite for Survival, Blaze for Leadership, Shine for Excellence	Resilience, excellence-driven leadership
2011–2012	Reloading the Spirit of Student Leadership	Renewal, motivation, leadership identity
2012–2013	Passion... Endless Possibilities... Paving the Road Toward Servant Leadership	Servant leadership, vocation
2013–2014	Breaking Stereotype Leadership... Equipping the Youth with Global Competencies & Christian Values	Global leadership, values integration
2014–2015	Ignite for Survival, Blaze for Leadership, Shine for Excellence	Continuity of resilience and excellence
2015–2016	Sprinting Towards Legacy: A Decade of Leadership Through Camaraderie	Legacy-building, camaraderie
2016–2017	Breaking Boundaries, Defying Norms	Innovation, adaptive leadership
2017–2018	Rise as One: Toward Together	Unity, collective leadership
2018–2019	Defining Our Dreams, Unifying in Excellence	Visioning, inclusive leadership
2019–2020	Surpassing Limitations Through Boundless Connections	Networked leadership, collaboration

Table 1 presents a longitudinal view of the Religare student leadership program from its inception in 2005 to its most recent iterations. The first five years of Religare were characterized by the absence of formally articulated themes, with the program primarily centered on leadership orientation and team building. This period reflects a foundational stage, emphasizing basic leadership awareness, teamwork, and student participation. The introduction of the Students’ Congress during the fifth year marks an early expansion toward participatory and representative leadership.

Beginning in 2010–2011, Religare adopted explicit thematic framing, signaling a maturation of the program’s leadership philosophy. Themes increasingly emphasized resilience, excellence, servant leadership, and values formation. As the program evolved, later themes reflected responsiveness to broader social and educational contexts, including global competencies, inclusivity, innovation, and collaboration. Thematic continuity—particularly around unity, excellence, and service—suggests that while the program adapted to changing contexts, it maintained a consistent leadership ethos. This evolution provides rich secondary data suitable for thematic analysis.

Table 2 Alignment of Religare Themes with Office of Student Affairs Leadership Goals

OSA Leadership Goal	Evidence from Religare Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holistic student formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early leadership & team building; leadership identity formation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical and values-based leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christian values, servant leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student engagement and participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students’ Congress; unity and camaraderie
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive and collaborative leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender development, unity, boundless connections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership for a changing society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global competencies, innovation, digital engagement

The alignment presented in Table 2 indicates that Religare closely mirrors the leadership development objectives of the Office of Student Affairs. Early leadership and team-building activities support holistic student formation, while later themes explicitly address ethical leadership, values integration, and social responsibility. The repeated emphasis on unity, camaraderie, and collective action reflects OSA’s commitment to student engagement and community-building.

Furthermore, the inclusion of global competencies, digital engagement, and networked leadership aligns Religare with contemporary student development frameworks that emphasize adaptability and social connectedness. This alignment affirms Religare’s institutional relevance and supports its use as a foundational reference in designing a formal leadership training program under the Office of Student Affairs.

Table 3 Strengths and Gaps Identified across Religare’s Thematic Development

Dimensions	Strengths	Gaps / Areas for Enhancement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program Continuity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-running leadership initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early years lacked articulated thematic framework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Philosophy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong values and service orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited explicit competency mapping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift to global, inclusive, and networked leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistent integration of emerging student issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual engagement and participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of a scaffolded training progression

Table 3 highlights Religare’s major strengths, particularly its longevity, adaptability, and strong values-based orientation.

The program’s sustained implementation demonstrates institutional commitment to student leadership development. Its thematic shift over time—from foundational leadership to global and networked leadership—indicates responsiveness to evolving student needs and societal demands.

However, the analysis also reveals critical gaps. The absence of formal themes in the early years and the lack of an explicit competency framework across iterations suggest that leadership development occurred without a clearly articulated progression.

While leadership concepts were introduced annually, there is limited evidence of cumulative skill development or assessment. Addressing these gaps requires transforming Religare’s thematic richness into a structured, developmental training model.

Table 4 Thematic Implications for Leadership Training Design

Thematic Insight	Training Design Implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundational focus in early years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include introductory leadership modules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift toward values and service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalize servant and ethical leadership tracks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on unity and collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate team-based and community leadership modules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global and networked leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include digital leadership and partnership-building components
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of progression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a tiered, developmental training framework

The implications outlined in Table 4 directly inform the proposed leadership training design. The early focus on leadership basics underscores the need for introductory modules, while later thematic emphases support advanced modules on servant leadership, inclusivity, and global engagement. The recurring theme of unity and collaboration highlights the importance of experiential and team-based learning approaches.

Most significantly, the absence of a scaffolded progression across Religare’s history points to the necessity of a tiered leadership training framework. Such a design would ensure intentional development—from foundational leadership skills to advanced, context-responsive competencies—while preserving Religare’s core values. This thematic analysis thus provides a strong empirical basis for designing a comprehensive, sustainable, and future-ready student leadership training program under the Office of Student Affairs.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Religare student leadership program has evolved from a foundational leadership and team-building activity into a thematically rich and values-oriented leadership formation initiative. The thematic analysis of souvenir programs and UACSC presidents’ accomplishment reports revealed a clear developmental trajectory in leadership framing—from basic leadership awareness and collaboration in the early years to more complex leadership concepts such as servant leadership, inclusivity, global competence, and networked leadership in later years. This progression reflects the institution’s responsiveness to changing student contexts and leadership demands.

The alignment of Religare’s themes with Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement, Kouzes and Posner’s Leadership Challenge, and Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership Theory underscores the program’s implicit theoretical grounding. The sustained emphasis on participation, teamwork, and engagement supports Astin’s assertion that involvement is central to student development. Similarly, the recurring focus on vision, unity, resilience, and ethical leadership corresponds with the leadership practices articulated by Kouzes and Posner. The prominence of spirituality, service, and values formation reflects Greenleaf’s conception of leadership as service. However, while these theoretical elements were evident across program iterations, they were not explicitly articulated within a unified framework, resulting in fragmented leadership development experiences. The study further revealed that although Religare has consistently promoted leadership values and engagement, it lacked a structured and scaffolded progression of leadership competencies. Leadership concepts were often introduced thematically on a yearly basis without clear continuity or cumulative skill development. This gap highlights the need to transition from a theme-based leadership activity to a coherent leadership training program that intentionally builds competencies over time. The proposed leadership training design addresses this need by translating historical themes into a tiered and theory-driven framework aligned with the Office of Student Affairs’ developmental mandate.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the Religare student leadership program possesses a strong institutional foundation for leadership formation rooted in values, service, and student engagement. Thematic

analysis of historical program documentation revealed consistent leadership philosophies aligned with established leadership theories, despite the absence of an explicit theoretical framework in program implementation. Religare's evolution reflects both continuity in leadership values and adaptability to emerging leadership contexts.

However, the study also concludes that the program's long-term impact on leadership development can be strengthened through intentional design, competency mapping, and structured progression. The lack of a unified leadership framework limited the program's capacity to systematically develop leadership competencies across student leaders' academic journeys. The proposed leadership training design provides a sustainable and evidence-based response by institutionalizing Religare's thematic strengths into a comprehensive leadership development model under the Office of Student Affairs.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. *Institutionalization of the Leadership Training Design.* The Office of Student Affairs may adopt the proposed leadership training design as a formal student leadership development program, ensuring continuity and coherence in leadership formation initiatives.
2. *Integration of Leadership Theories.* Explicit integration of Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Challenge, and Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory is recommended to strengthen the theoretical grounding of leadership activities and training modules.
3. *Development of a Tiered Leadership Framework.* Leadership programs should be structured according to developmental levels, allowing student leaders to progress from foundational leadership awareness to advanced leadership practice.
4. *Documentation and Program Evaluation.* Systematic documentation and regular evaluation of leadership programs are recommended to ensure continuous improvement and to generate data for future institutional research.
5. *Expansion of Leadership Competency Areas.* Future leadership training may incorporate emerging leadership concerns such as mental well-being, sustainability, innovation, and digital citizenship to further enhance relevance.
6. *Future Research.* Further studies may explore the impact of the proposed leadership training design on student leadership outcomes or examine student leadership development using mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving document analysis. The data sources consisted solely of institutional documents and archival records, and no human participants were directly involved. Permission to access and use the documents was obtained through appropriate institutional channels. All data were used exclusively for academic purposes, and proper acknowledgment of institutional ownership was observed. The study ensured confidentiality by avoiding the disclosure of sensitive or personally identifiable information and by presenting findings in an aggregated and interpretive manner. Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process.

Annex A

Proposed Leadership Training Design for Religare

Rationale

The proposed training design transforms the historical themes of the Religare program into a structured, scaffolded, and theory-driven leadership development program. It integrates:

- Astin's Student Involvement Theory → ensures active engagement and experiential learning,

- Kouzes & Posner’s Leadership Challenge → develops observable leadership behaviors, and
- Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership Theory → embeds values, ethics, and service-oriented leadership.

The design aims to enhance student leaders’ competencies, values, and confidence, building a pipeline of effective, responsible, and service-oriented student leaders.

Objectives

The training program aims to:

1. Develop student leaders’ self-awareness, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.
2. Cultivate vision-driven, resilient, and ethical leadership practices.
3. Promote servant leadership, inclusivity, and values-based decision-making.
4. Provide opportunities for active involvement and reflection aligned with institutional mission.
5. Prepare student leaders to apply learned competencies in campus and community initiatives.

Structure of the Training Program

The design follows a tiered, scaffolded structure, progressing from foundational to advanced leadership development.

Level	Theme / Focus	Sample Modules / Activities	Leadership Theory Alignment	Learning Outcomes
Level 1 – Foundational	Team Building & Self-Leadership	Icebreakers, personality assessments, goal setting, teamwork exercises	Astin	Understand personal strengths, practice collaboration, develop commitment to involvement
Level 2 – Competency Development	Servant Leadership & Values	Service projects, reflection journals, mentorship sessions	Greenleaf	Apply ethical and service-oriented leadership; demonstrate empathy and stewardship
Level 3 – Strategic Leadership	Vision & Innovation	Scenario-based problem solving, leadership case studies, project planning	Kouzes & Posner	Inspire shared vision, challenge processes, enable peers to act, encourage team engagement
Level 4 – Application & Integration	Leading Change & Community Engagement	Capstone leadership project, peer coaching, portfolio presentation	Astin, Kouzes & Posner, Greenleaf	Integrate learned competencies, lead initiatives, evaluate outcomes, reflect on personal and team growth

Learning Strategies

The program emphasizes active, experiential, and reflective learning, including:

- Workshops and seminars on leadership theories and practical skills.
- Group projects and service-learning initiatives to apply servant leadership principles.

- Mentorship and peer coaching to encourage reflection and personal growth.
- Digital platforms for collaboration, sharing reflections, and tracking progress.

Evaluation / Assessment

- Self-assessment surveys to measure confidence, self-awareness, and leadership behaviors.
- Peer and mentor feedback to evaluate teamwork, ethics, and problem-solving.
- Reflection journals to assess values integration and personal growth.
- Project outcomes / community impact reports to evaluate applied leadership skills.

Program Duration

- Designed to run across an academic year, with modules spaced for incremental development.
- Optional summer intensives or leadership camps for advanced experiential learning.

Implementation Recommendations

1. Adopt the proposed design as the official Religare leadership curriculum.
2. Integrate the design into existing Office of Student Affairs programs.
3. Provide training for facilitators and mentors to ensure alignment with leadership theories.
4. Document activities, monitor progress, and conduct annual evaluation to refine program content.

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