

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Let me jump into Higher Education mode and provide background information that is foundational for the engagement, retention, and development of college students. Vincent Tinto's model of student departure has had the greatest influence on our understanding of student retention. His theory helped guide a large number of dissertations and empirical studies of student retention. The model posits that students enter college with family and individual attributes as well as precollege schooling. They enter with certain commitments, both to finishing college and to staying at their college. They enter an academic system that is characterized by grade performance and intellectual development, which together lead to academic integration, and they enter a social system where peer group interactions and faculty interactions lead to social integration. Academic and social integration work together to influence ongoing goal and institutional commitments, which, in turn, lead to the decision to remain in, or to leave, college.

The explanatory theory underlying Tinto's model came most immediately from the research of William Spady (1971), who saw an analogy between committing suicide and dropping out of school. In both instances, according to Spady, a person leaves a social system. The French philosopher and sociologist Émile Durkheim had found that some people committed suicide because they lacked the values of the social system in which they participated, and because they were not supported by a group of friends. At the core of his model, Tinto borrowed Spady's use of Durkheim's two postulates to identify the concepts of academic and social integration. Academic integration was thought to be the result of sharing academic values, and social integration was viewed as the result of developing friendships with other students and faculty members. In Tinto's model, a student who does not achieve some level of academic or social integration is likely to leave school.

While Tinto's later model (1993) is similar in structure to his earlier ones, it offers another explanation of student departure: failure to negotiate the rites of passage. According to this theory, students would remain enrolled if they separated themselves from their family and high school friends, engaged in processes by which they identified with and took on the values of other students and faculty, and committed themselves to pursuing those values and behaviors.

A second theoretical thrust came from John Bean, based on empirical and theoretical studies published in the 1980s, an explanatory model of student retention (Bean 1990), and a psychological model of student retention developed by John Bean and Shevawn Eaton (2000). Originally based on a model of turnover in work organizations, Bean's model evolved into one where the overall structure was based on a psychological model that linked any given behavior (in this case, retention) with similar past behavior, normative values, attitudes, and intentions. While based on psychological processes, the model was similar to Tinto's in that it was complex and longitudinal. The model differed from Tinto's original model in two important ways, however: It included environmental variables (or factors outside of the college that might affect retention) and a student's intentions, a factor found to be the best predictor of student retention. These factors were subsequently incorporated into Tinto's model in 1993.

Bean's model, describing traditional-age students, posits that background variables, particularly a student's high school educational experiences, educational goals, and family support, influence the way a student interacts with the college or university that the student chose to attend. After matriculation (as in Tinto's model) the student interacts with institutional members in the academic and social arena. According to Bean, the student also interacts in the organizational (bureaucratic) area, and is simultaneously influenced by environmental factors, such as wanting to be with a significant other at another school or running out of money. A student's interaction with the institution leads the student to develop a set of attitudes toward himself or herself as a student and toward the school. Academic capabilities (as indicated by grade point average), feeling one fits in at an institution, and loyalty to the institution are a secondary set of outcomes that are extremely important in determining a student's intentions to remain enrolled, as well as actually continuing enrollment. Bean and Barbara Metzner (1985) also developed a model of student retention for nontraditional students which reduced the emphasis on social integration factors since nontraditional (older, working, commuting) students have less interaction with others on campus than do traditional, residential students.

Bean and Eaton's (2000) model describes how three psychological processes affect academic and social integration. While attitude-behavior theory provides an overall structure for the model, self-efficacy theory, coping behavioral (approach-avoidance) theory, and attribution (locus of control) theory are used to explain how students develop academic and social integration.

Both experiences before entering college and academic abilities are important; the way students interact in the social and academic environment once at college are important, as are factors from outside of the institution, particularly the cost of attending the college; and the attitudes a student forms about the institution and about his or her role of being a student at a particular institution (*Do I fit in? Am I developing? Am I validated?*) are also important aspects of a student's decision to remain enrolled.

Specific Factors Affecting Retention Decisions

There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of specific reasons a student might leave college before graduation. Theoretical models classify groups of variables that are assumed to relate to some general underlying causes. For example, a general feeling of fitting in might be related to fitting in in the classroom, with one's roommates, with a team member or members of a club, with faculty members, with other students in one's major, with a campus ministry, with a church, with sports fans, and so on. Any list of factors associated with student retention will only be a partial list. The specific factors affecting retention decisions at colleges and universities vary from institution to institution and according to gender, age, and ethnicity. The following groupings are selected factors that are often looked at when doing retention studies of traditional residential students. When these factors are viewed positively by students they enhance retention, and when viewed negatively they decrease retention.

Background Variables. These include parental support, parents' education, parents' income, educational goals, precollege academic success (high class rank, grade point average, standardized test scores), college preparatory curriculum, and friends attending college. For minority students, background variables include extended family support, church and community support, and previous positive interracial/intercultural contact, and for nontraditional students they include spouse support and employer support.

Organizational Factors. These include financial aid, orientation programs, rules and regulations, memberships in campus organizations, involvement in decision-making, housing policies, counseling, the bursars office, ease of registration, and staff attitudes toward students. For minority students, organizational factors include role models in staff and faculty, a supportive environment, at least 20 percent minority enrollment, and not viewing rules as oppressive. For nontraditional students, parking, child care, campus safety, availability of services after hours, evening/weekend scheduling, and cost per credit hour are factors.

Academic Factors. These include courses offered, positive faculty interaction (both in class and out of class), advising, general skills programs (e.g., basic skills, study skills, math, and English tutoring/help centers), campus resources (e.g., computer, library, athletic, college union), absenteeism, certainty of major, and academic integration. Factors affecting minority students include warm classroom climate and faculty role models, and those affecting nontraditional students include the expectation for individual faculty member attention.

Social Factors. Among the social factors affecting retention are close friends on campus, peer culture, social involvement (e.g., service learning, campus organizations, off campus connections), informal contact with faculty, identification with a group on campus, and social integration. For minority students, social factors also include a positive intercultural/interracial environment and at least 20 percent minority enrollment.

Environmental Factors. These include continued parental support, little opportunity to transfer, financial resources, significant other elsewhere, family responsibilities, getting married, and a job off campus more than twenty hours per week. Factors affecting minority students also include the availability of grants.

Attitudes, intentions, and Psychological Processes. These include self-efficacy as a student, sense of self-development and self-confidence, internal locus of control, strategies of approach, motivation to study, need for achievement, satisfaction, practical value of one's education, stress, alienation, loyalty, sense of fitting it, and intention to stay enrolled. For minority students, self-validation is also a factor.

Several studies have shown that students with a deep faith commitment do better on critical indicators of academic success (Mooney 2005). Typically, studies finding a positive impact of religious factors on school success measure “religiosity” with an indicator of religious participation. Religious participation cuts across denominational lines. Religious participation and personal religiosity can help lower rates of substance abuse, and limit activities that undermine college careers (Regnerus 2000). Students who participate in religious groups have made a choice about social commitments. Being active in religion (church/ministries) precludes other types of social ties, particularly ones which might cut against the prescriptions and proscriptions of religious traditions. If a student is going to church on Sunday, she is unlikely to be found at the bar on Saturday. Commitments to religious groups also preclude negative behaviors like going home for the weekend, or taking impromptu road trips. Connections to positive social groups promote conformity, and in the college setting, conformity means going to class and completing assignments. Alcohol and substance abuse are among the most important factors predicting negative educational outcomes. Most religious groups oppose alcohol use, or at least militate against drunkenness. Hence, students who choose to join religious groups are going to be less likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs (Regnerus 2000). Depression, loneliness, and anxiety are also strongly associated with poor college performance. Students who are depressed often skip classes, return home, or begin abusing alcohol or drugs. Church and campus ministries provide a basis for social support outside of the home, thus combating the loneliness and isolation which can lead to mental health problems (Sherkat & Ellison 1999). Students connected with a church and/or ministry can also be expected to devote time and energy to a variety of pro-social causes (Wilson & Janoski 1995). Indeed, religious students and their organizations have forged the backbone of social activism on a variety of causes; from civil rights for African Americans, to opposition to the war in Vietnam, to the anti-Apartheid movement, to homelessness, to opposition to support for varied brutal dictatorships (Zald 2000). Students with a deep faith frequently help connect colleges with the surrounding community, and provide volunteers and partnerships with groups like the Boys and Girls Clubs, Scouting groups, and Head Start programs. Much of the volunteering and activism on college campuses is forged in religious organizations by religious students.

I know all of this may be overkill, but for the university to fulfill her mission we must help students to connect in healthy and positive ways with groups committed to the values of the university. The more touch points and groups that encourage and foster the holistic development of students the better. As a Christian College it is imperative that we help students maintain and develop their relationship with Christ as they face the challenges and developmental tasks. One of the primary objectives of Christian Higher Education is to help students “own their faith.” Students should be able to articulate what they believe and why and then passionately pursue Christ. With a genuine and growing faith the beliefs of students will influence their behaviors.

A UCLA study asked college students to describe themselves as one of the following: religious, spiritual or secular. Their answers were spread fairly evenly among the options with 32.4% saying that they were more spiritual, 31.8% describing themselves as religious, and 28.2% finding greater affinity with secularism. More than two-thirds of the respondents admitted that they pray. The vast majority say that they are searching for meaning and purpose. Half consider it essential to seek further opportunities to

help them grow spiritually. These answers are quite revealing. They show the mindset of young adults who are in a critical phase of their lives.

When asked whether they thought it was important for them to follow religious teachings in their everyday life, 40% answered in the affirmative. Those who believe in God vastly outnumber those who don't. However, a study found that student engagement in religious services tends to drop off as time went on. In the first semester, the average attendance is 1.6 times a month. By the second semester, this drops down to just once a month. The trend is consistent as they stay longer in the university. There are a lot of possible reasons for this including academic load, new social groups, and the rise of other interests.

There was another survey on the topic that was conducted at 50 colleges and universities. It found that 14% of freshmen participate in campus religious groups frequently. A further 16% did the same but only on occasion. They followed the patterns as the years went on. It showed that student engagement drops by 23% in the first three years of college. Even the most enthusiastic ones can lose their way for a bit. This trend goes on throughout their adult life. In fact, one study found that only 20% of individuals who were heavily involved in their church during their teenage years remained active by the time they hit 29.

Countless researchers have taken on this subject from different angles. Their findings are mostly congruent. They point to the fact that there are many benefits of being spiritual on our physical health and psychological well-being. When asked whether they frequently feel at peace, 46% of spiritual students said yes. Only 16% of the non-questers answered in the affirmative. That is a big gap that certainly merits further questions for a deeper understanding. There is clearly something about faith that makes people feel more centered which is a goal of a lot of individuals.

Among students struggling with religious issues, 26% often found themselves staying up all night, 10% missed school because of illness, and 34% were struggling to maintain a healthy diet. The numbers were far lower among those who aren't having any internal struggles when it comes to religion. It can be argued from this that the mental stress is seeping into other areas of their lives and making them unhealthy. It has also been established that highly spiritual and religious students are more likely to abstain from alcohol and cigarettes compared to their peers. They are better at sticking to a healthy diet and maintaining above average physical health.

The HERI study which encompassed over fourteen thousand college students found that those who reported being at least somewhat religious experienced fewer symptoms of depression than those who declared themselves as non-religious. Their beliefs were able to shield them from anxiety and other negative thoughts. This is perhaps because they feel like they have some form of support from a higher power; that things are always in God's control, even if they personally cannot do anything in many

situations. This ability to control their thoughts and adhere to a more positive mindset helps them immensely as they go through a lot of tough times as young adults.

We know that faith helps students cope with physical and mental challenges. We are also aware that their engagement drops over time. This is a non-ideal situation wherein people are walking away from what seems to be a good solution to many of their problems. MC should emphasize the spiritual development of our students to help them become more successful in both their academic and extra-curricular activities. There are a lot of things that we can do if we are serious about focusing on this issue. Some are relatively simple while others require a bit more resources.

We can work to increase the visibility of churches and ministries that support the religious and spiritual lives of students. This gives interested individuals easy access to the things that they sorely need. Connection to the local church needs to be an integral component of student leadership programs and experiences. Every Christian should be connected to the local body and students need to know that MC values the local church and encourages them to invest their lives with a local body. We need to implement professional development programs that prepares the staff, faculty, and peer leaders to facilitate discussions on spiritual issues. As students come from diverse backgrounds, there needs to be discussions and forums that promote understanding among them. We need to value the impact and influence of churches and campus ministries on student engagement, commitment, retention and development.

The Mississippi College Community must refuse to compartmentalize her Commitment to Christ. Our task is to inspire and equip individuals to think and act for themselves in the dignity of being created in God's image. We are to open student's eyes to all the world has to offer and do so in a way that helps them understand that everything is ultimately unified and derived from the Lord. Our commitment to Christ should help enlarge horizons, deepen insights, sharpen the mind, sensitize perspectives, and create a passion for truth and integrity. It should be our goal for students to leave this campus with an unreserved commitment to God and His purposes, a confidence in the gospel, and a self-giving devotion to the Lord and others.

Student formation must be intentional and should provide opportunities for students to integrate their belief and behavior. Fully developing students means that integrity is our objective. MC students need to embrace and exhibit: 1) Biblical convictions – a worldview sufficient for life's questions and crises developed from an understanding of scripture. 2) Christian character – an integrated moral identity, the same day after day and the same inwardly and outwardly unified by values and virtue that draws everything into harmony. 3) Community commitment – living out their convictions and values with others that are mutually committed to Christ and His purposes.

Our vision is to be known as a university recognized for academic excellence and commitment to the cause of Christ.

OUR CORE VALUES

By embracing the Mission and Vision of Mississippi College the members of the university community are striving to practice and promote:

Fidelity

We commit ourselves to the life and teachings of Christ Jesus.

Integrity

We strive daily to exhibit Christ-like character.

Inquiry and Knowledge

We pursue knowledge and truth.

Service

We use our gifts, talents, and abilities to advance the genuine well-being of our community and promote Christian values.

Respect

We commit to building a community that challenges, inspires, liberates, and ultimately transforms.

Excellence

We utilize our God-given gifts to the best of our abilities in order to produce the highest quality of work.

Stewardship

We carefully shepherd our resources.

Departmental Visions/Goals/Objectives:

Vision – *“A Picture of a preferred future that produces a passion in you.*

Passion – *“That which you are compelled to do to see the vision become a reality.”*

The Office of Christian Development seeks to be the catalyst for maintaining and advancing Mississippi College’s commitment to the cause of Christ.

Goals

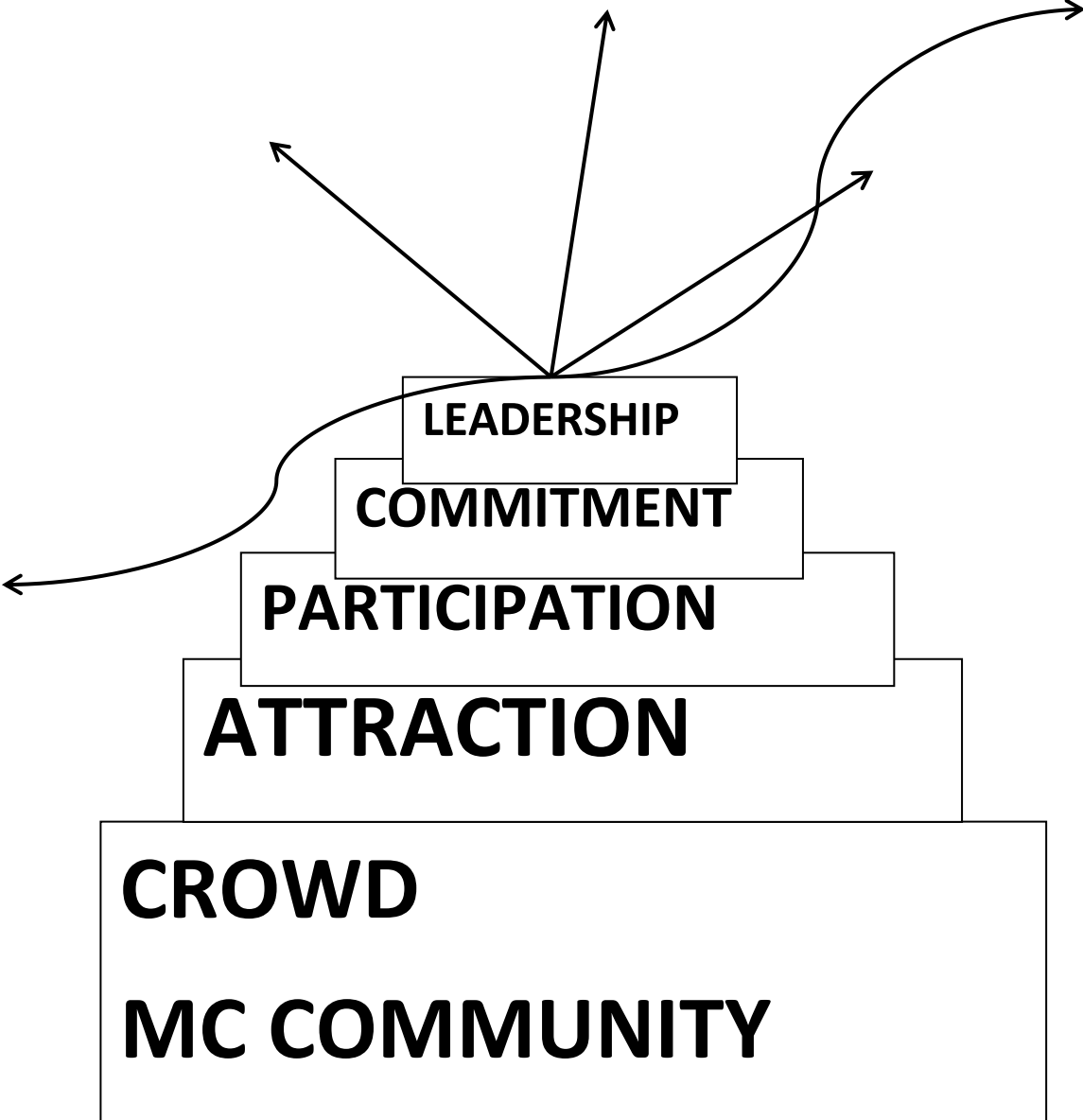
We want to create an environment that provides the campus community opportunities to know Christ, mature in Christ, serve God, serve others, and develop habits and relationships that will bring pleasure to the Lord and transform individuals and communities.

Objectives

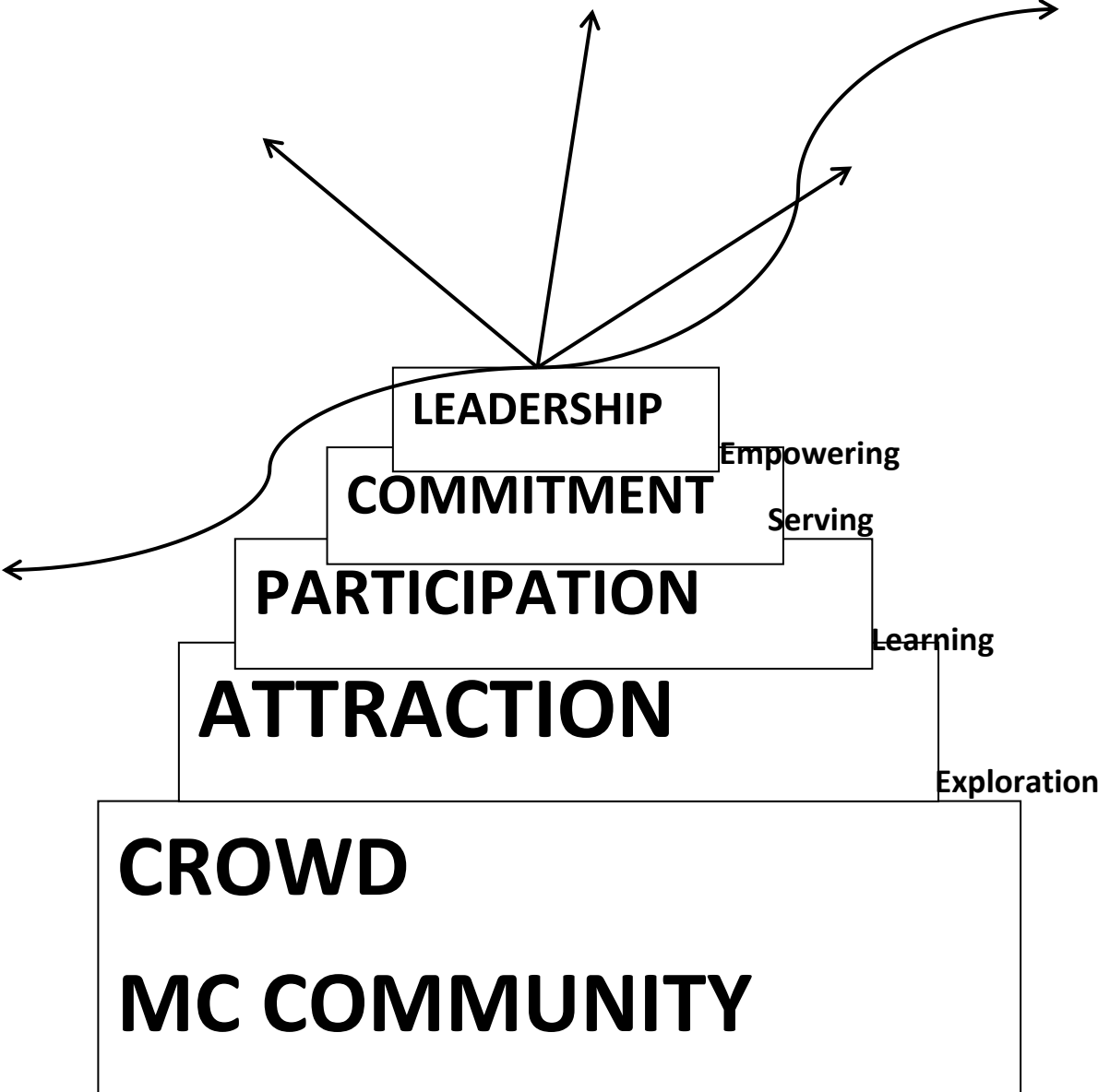
Our desire is for members of the MC Community to

- See the Lord Accurately (Clearly)
- Respond to the Lord Appropriately (Correctly)
- Live for the Lord Authentically (Consistently)

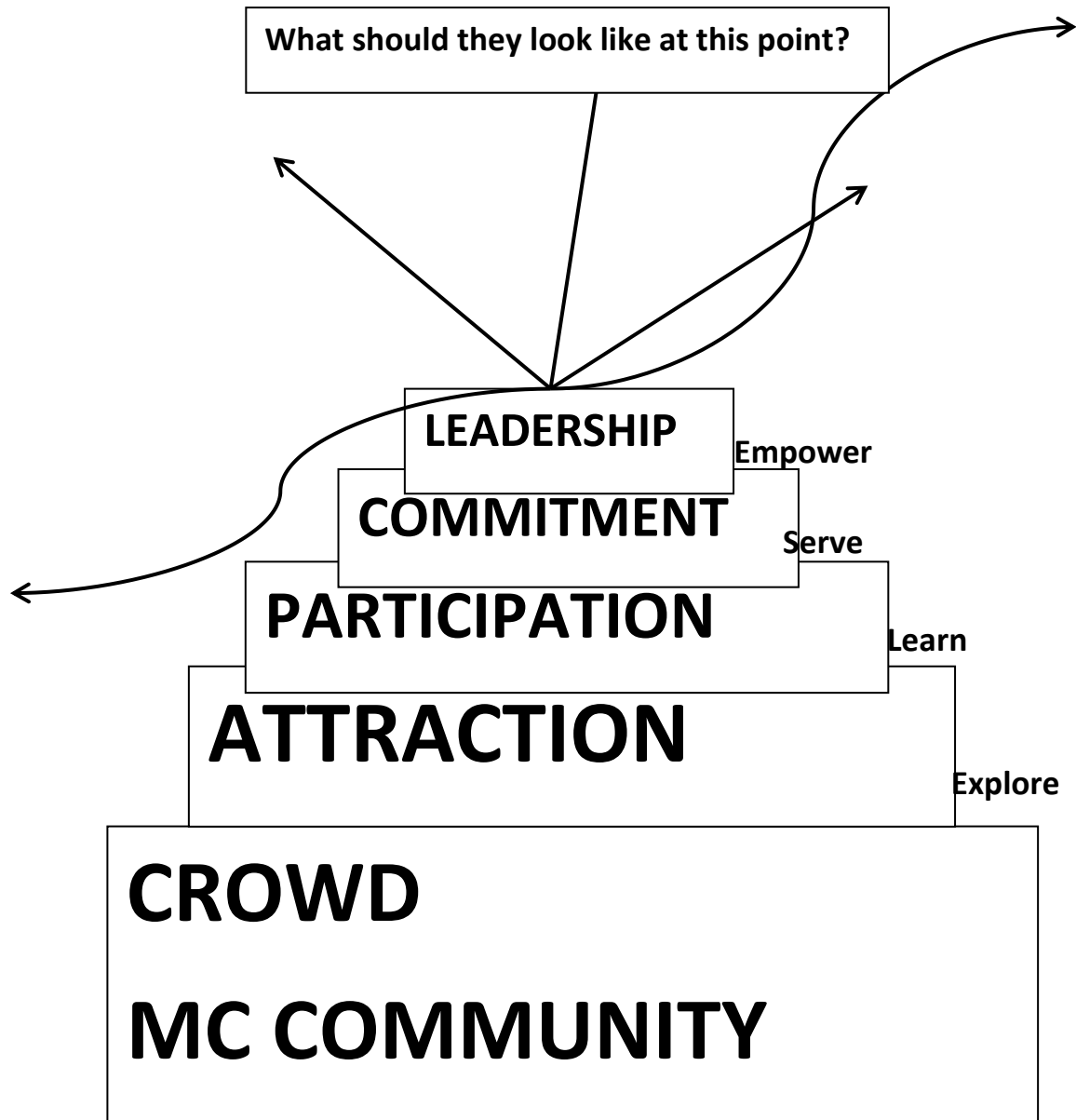
STUDENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



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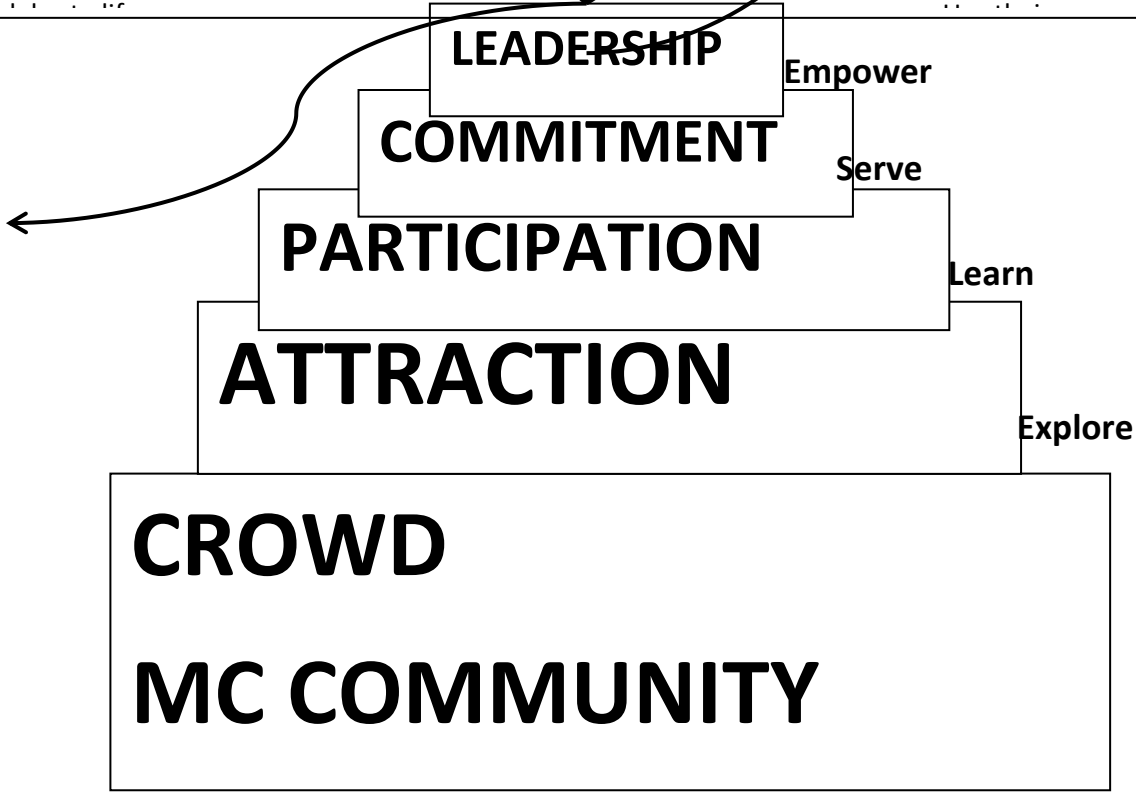
STUDENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

What should they look like at this point?

When students leave MC they should...

- Love the Lord Jesus Christ
- Exhibit Christ-like Character
- Be connected to the local Body
- Complete all tasks with Excellence

- Be prepared for a career
- Have a desire to serve
- Demonstrate Respect for all persons
- Have a love for learning



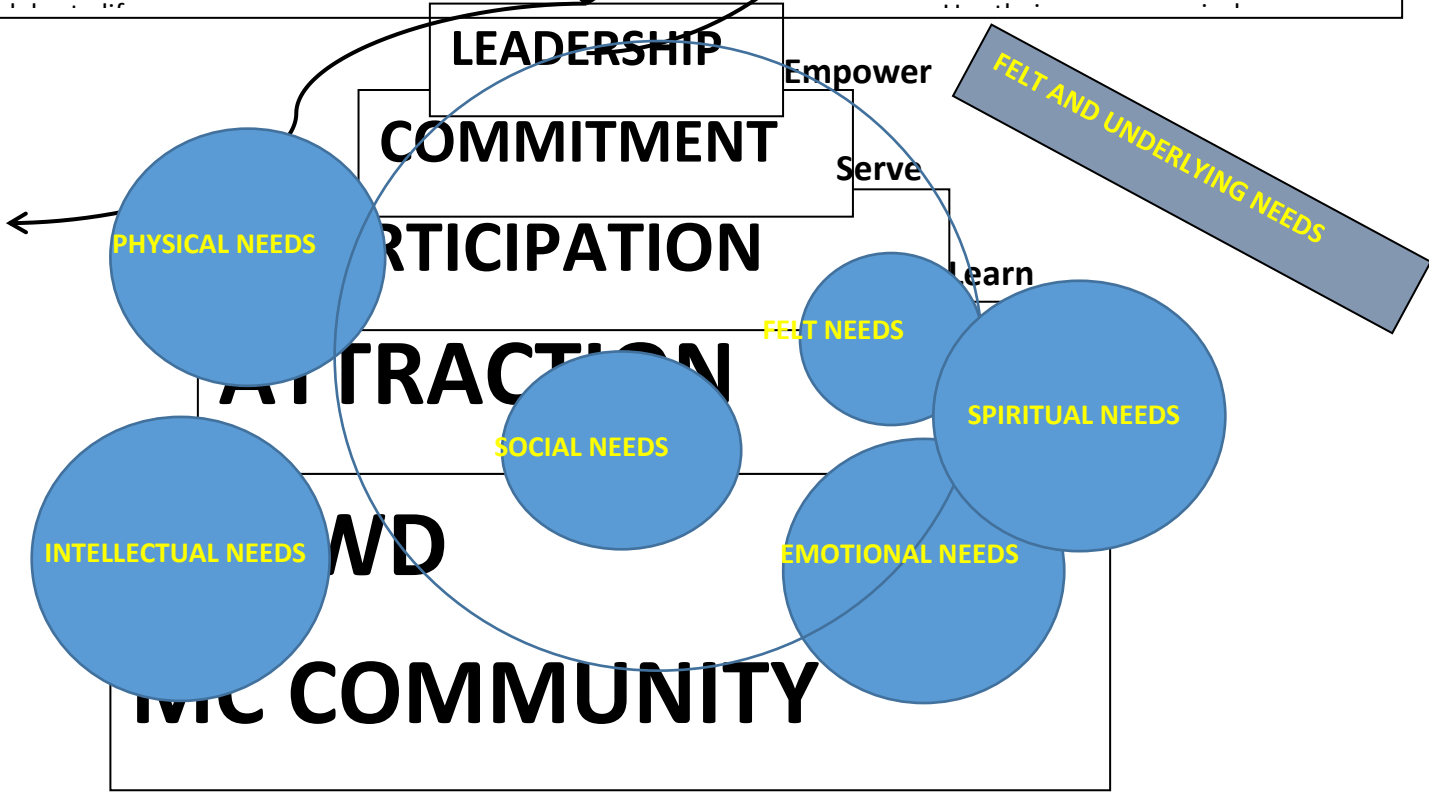
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LEADERSHIP

Empower

COMMITMENT

Serve

PARTICIPATION

Learn

ATTRACTION

Emotions

Support

FLOW

Challenges

Competency

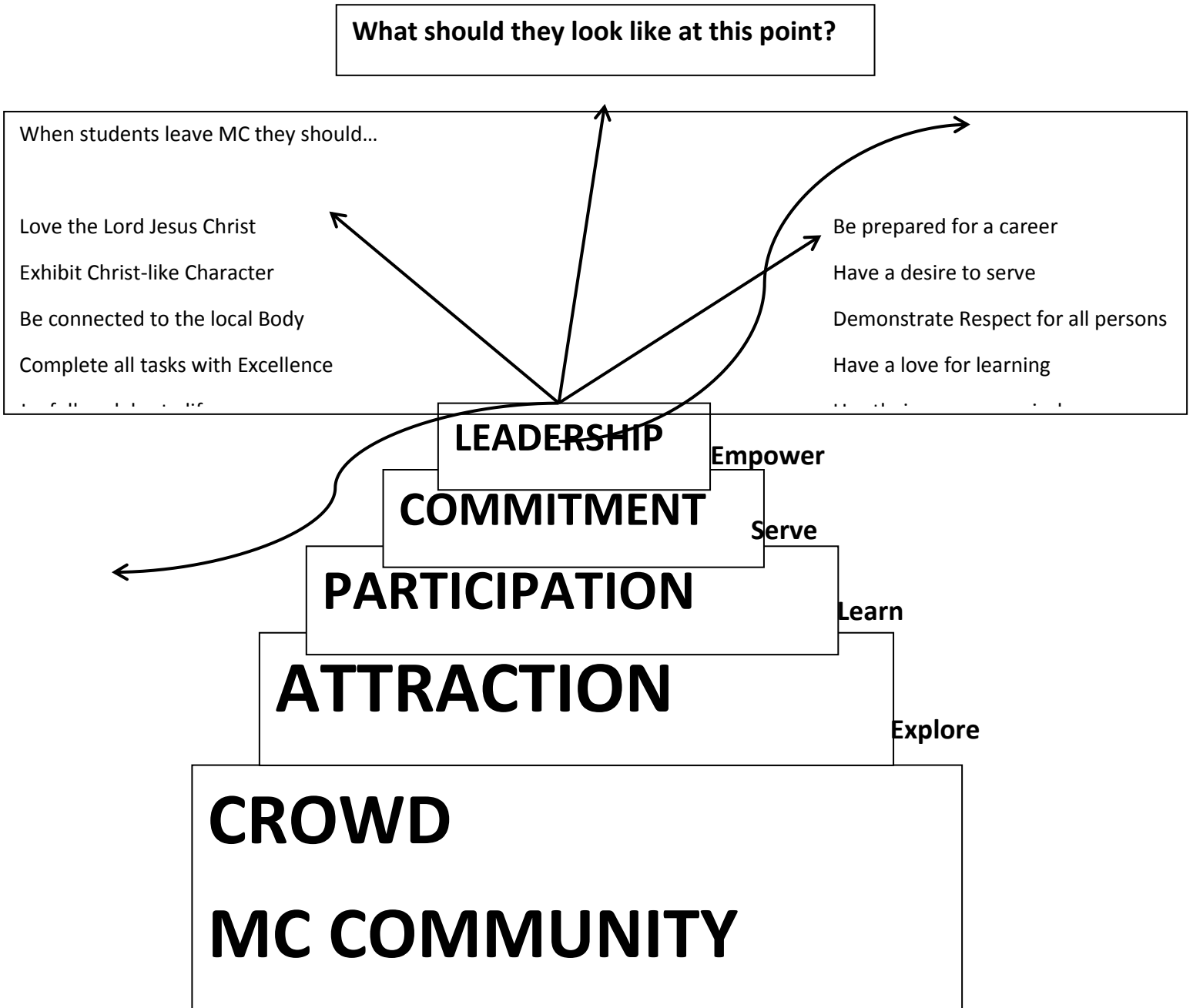
MC COMMUNITY

Developmental Issues

Identity
Development

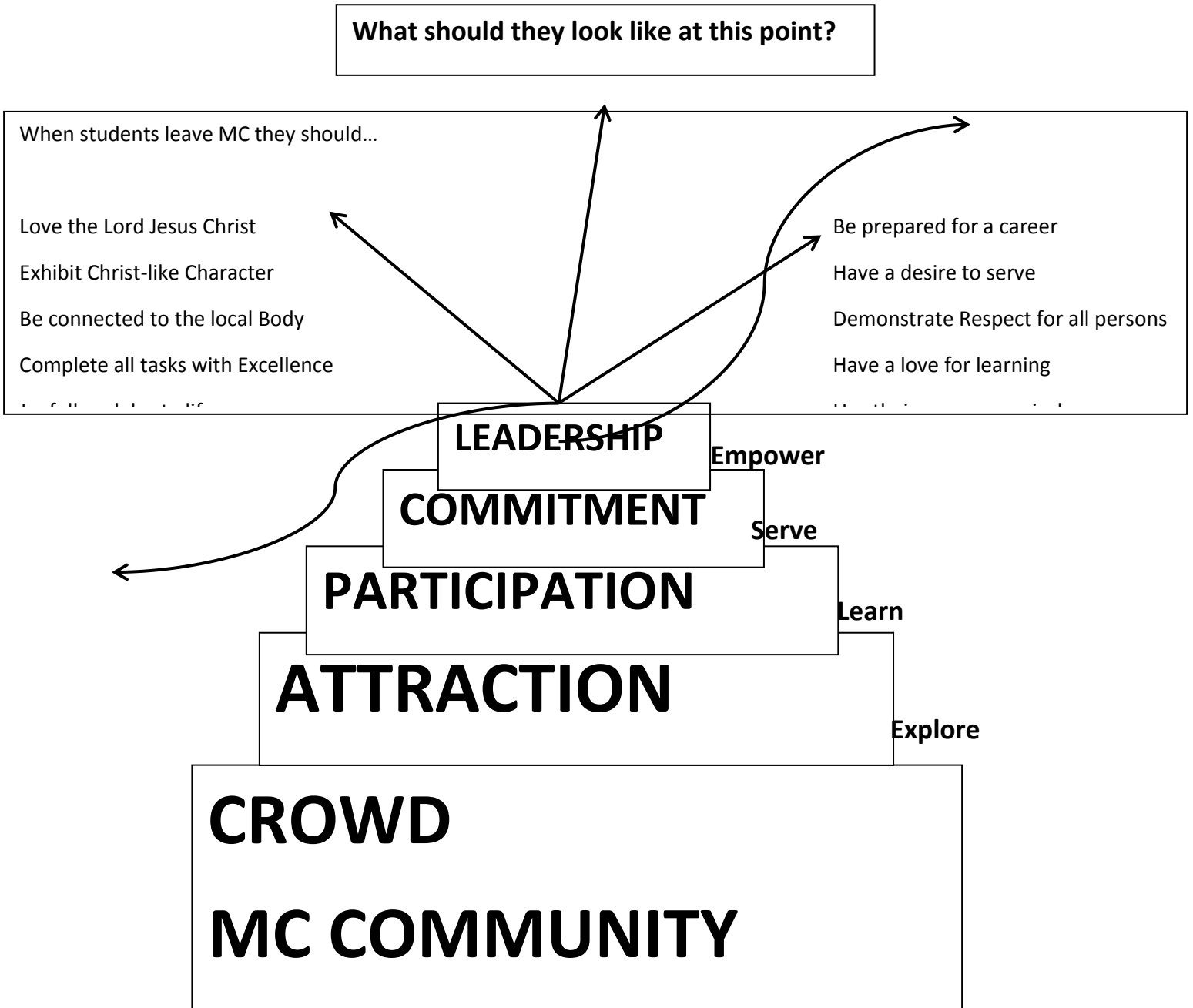
Transition

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



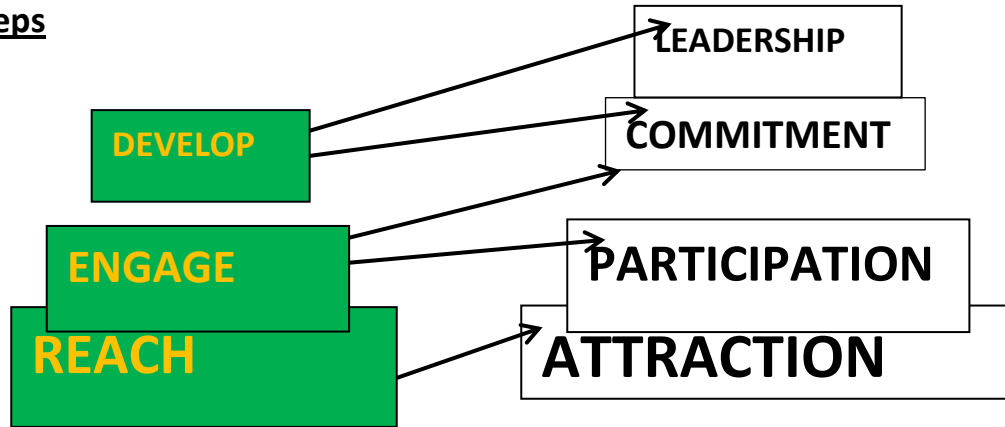
What are we trying to do for/with/to our students?

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



What actions, systems, processes and/or steps need to be in place to move them up?

Think Steps



Questions for each Organization/Event

Determine the group(s) that the event/activity/group is most likely to reach

Define what a person that has been reached means:

Being eng

from exploration to participation aged means a person is...

How do we move?
from learning about to commitment to?
from serving in to leading others?

Leaders should be developing the following “*soft skills*” through the creation, implementation, and evaluation process:

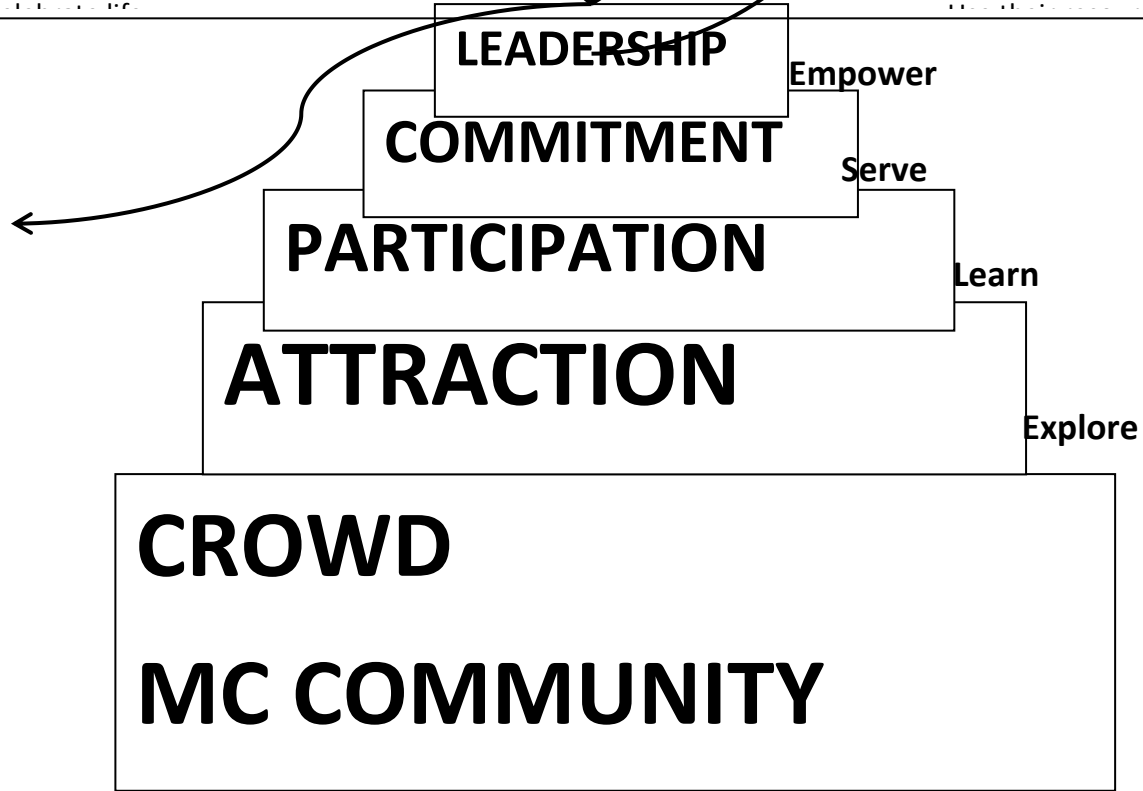
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