SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY • WASHINGTON, DC

School of Public Affairs
Key Undergraduate Leadership Program
Certificate in Key Undergraduate Leadership

CURRICULUM

Year 1

SPA-352 Leadership for Key Undergraduates (1 credit)

This initial course, modeled on Leadership for Key Executives (PUAD-622), provides students with team-building opportunities and establishes cohort norms designed to create an inclusive culture of trust. These early sessions also build a year-one foundation for what will become a career-long support group.

Credit Hour(s): one | Semester: Fall

SPA-353 The Emotionally Intelligent Leader (3 credits)

This course will help students understand the impact of a leader's emotional intelligence on agency/organizational culture, performance, wellness, diversity & inclusion, and other outcomes. Students will learn about the drivers of emotional intelligence and how those drivers align to individual and organizational wellness. Additionally, students will take an emotional intelligence assessment (EQ-i2.0) and receive executive coaching. Students will learn skills to improve their resilience as they navigate life and work challenges.

Credit Hour(s): three | Semester: Spring

Year 2

SPA-354 Contemporary Approaches to Leadership (1 credit)

Students will examine changing conceptions around leadership in recent years and align the role of leadership to complex public administration challenges. Students will build on their year one work in emotional and social intelligence to influence, inspire, and create psychological safety.

Credit Hour(s): one | Semester: Fall

SPA-355 Problem Solving for Leaders (1 credit)

Students will study the methods for gathering and analyzing information that better inform effective and accurate decisions; learn to differentiate among different types of problems (i.e., simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic); and understand the correct leadership tools utilized in developing solutions.

Credit Hour(s): one | Semester: Spring

Vision

The Key Undergraduate Leadership Certificate Program focuses on developing the foundational skills, knowledge, and values needed for future public and non-profit leaders.

Pillars

The Key Undergraduate Leadership Program (Key-U) classes and activities will focus in the following four key pillars:

· Strategy
· Agility
· Connection
· Reflection

SPA-491 Key Undergraduate Organizational Behavior (3-6 credits)

Students will learn the drivers of culture, managing the dyadic relationship between supervisors and employees, building productive relationships with peers, and understanding the different types of power influences. These sessions will include guest lectures from prominent Key and SPA alumni and public administration thought leaders.

Credit Hour(s): three | Semester: Spring

Year 3

During the third year, students will start work on an internship assignment or research project focusing on an aspect of public administration leadership.

SPA-457 Leadership Reflections (3 credits)

This final course in the certificate program is designed to help students apply what they have learned since year one. The course is based on a particular premise: effective leadership, which is shared, relational, and part of a complex social dynamic involving inquiry and dialogue, is also an ongoing personal journey, requiring expanded cognitive and emotional intelligence.

Credit Hour(s): three | Semester: Fall

Meet the Program Director

Dr. Russell Robinson is the Director of the newly created Key Undergraduate Leadership Program (Key). He is an alum of and Associate Professor within SPA, specifically the Key Executive Leadership Program. His expertise is on public sector leadership with an emphasis on employee voice/silence and employee engagement. He is a frequent guest lecturer and keynote speaker on the topics of the Future of Work, employee engagement, voice culture, resilience, wellness, and diversity & inclusion. Prior to working at AU, Robinson spent 22 years as a civil servant within the U.S. Federal Government, where he developed and taught leadership and culture to all levels of employees.

Hear from the Students

- "KULP has given me a community of like-minded people to experience my first year that I wouldn't have had otherwise. I've not only made friends but also learned what being in a real cohort is which has been super rewarding and fun." – **Analice**

- "KULP has given me a supportive community where I can learn more about myself in the context of leadership and emotional intelligence. Our classes always find a way to make me smile and make me think in a way that makes me look excited for the next class." -- **Holly**

At A Glance

- 13 credit hour certificate works with any major at AU
- 3-Years Program
- Dedicated faculty for the program
- Flexible regarding other AU certificate programs
- Application opens in spring

Course Requirements (13 credits)

- SPA-352, Leadership for Key Undergraduates (1)
- SPA-353, The Emotionally Intelligent Leader (3)
- SPA-354, Contemporary Approaches to Leadership (1)
- SPA-355, Problem Solving for Leaders (1)
- SPA-356, Key Undergraduate Organizational Behavior (3 – 6)
- SPA-357, Leadership Reflection (3)

QUESTIONS?

Contact

School of Public Affairs Student Services

202-885-6200

aupublicaffairs@american.edu

Updated: September 2026