

Leadership and Psychological Well-Being

Caring for the Mind that Leads

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The Evergreen State College
Summer 2026

LEVEL Graduate · MPA	CREDITS 4	PREREQUISITES None	FORMAT Online · Zoom + Canvas
MEETS Tuesdays, 6:00–8:50 p.m.	TERM Summer Quarter · 10 Weeks	ZOOM evergreen.zoom.us/j/99274650996	

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on the critical importance of psychological well-being in leadership and on the necessity of caring for the mental health of those who lead. Effective leadership requires not only strategy and skill, but mental resilience, emotional balance, self-awareness, and the ability to sustain oneself in high-pressure roles.

Participants will explore emotional intelligence, stress and recovery, burnout prevention, mindfulness, psychological safety, and the habits and structures that sustain mental health at work. The course examines how psychological well-being shapes decision-making, relationships, ethical judgment, and organizational outcomes — through the lens of the Leadership Intelligence framework: Self Intelligence, Human Intelligence, and System Intelligence.

Through discussion, case analysis, field observation, online journals, and reflective assignments, students will learn to recognize leadership stress, prevent burnout, care for themselves responsibly, and shape environments that support both personal and team well-being. The course treats mental health not as a private luxury but as a leadership responsibility.

COURSE THESIS

Leadership begins in the condition of the leader's inner life.

A leader does not make decisions from a neutral place. Leaders make decisions from the condition of their mind, body, emotions, stress patterns, assumptions, relationships, and level of psychological well-being.

When leaders are grounded, self-aware, emotionally balanced, and mentally resilient, they are more capable of making thoughtful decisions, building trust, communicating with care, and creating healthy organizational environments. When leaders are chronically stressed, burned out, emotionally reactive, or depleted, their decision-making, relationships, and organizational impact suffer.

Caring for the mind that leads is not self-indulgence. It is a core leadership discipline.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE FRAMEWORK

The course is organized around three intelligences that move the student from individual self-care to relational care to system care.

01 SELF INTELLIGENCE <i>Caring for Self</i> Understanding and caring for the inner life from which leadership emerges — stress patterns, emotional triggers, leadership habits, boundaries, burnout risks, and recovery practices. CORE QUESTION <i>How do I understand and care for the inner life from which I lead?</i>	02 HUMAN INTELLIGENCE <i>Caring for Others</i> Understanding and supporting others as whole human beings — empathy, communication, psychological safety, trust, relational boundaries, and the emotional labor of leadership. CORE QUESTION <i>How do I lead others with empathy and care without losing myself in the process?</i>	03 SYSTEM INTELLIGENCE <i>Caring for the Conditions</i> Recognizing and improving the systems that shape mental health and leadership effectiveness — workload, control, reward, community, fairness, values, culture, and policy. CORE QUESTION <i>How do I recognize and improve the systems that affect psychological well-being?</i>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- 01 Explain the connection between psychological well-being and leadership effectiveness.

- 02 Apply the Leadership Intelligence framework — Self, Human, and System — to questions of leader well-being.

- 03 Use The Mind of the Leader framework of mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion to analyze leadership behavior.

- 04 Develop strategies to manage stress, complete the stress cycle, prevent depletion, and practice sustainable self-care.

- 05 Cultivate emotional intelligence, contemplative practice, and organizational cultures that prioritize psychological safety and mental health.

- 06 Assess organizational conditions using evidence-based frameworks including Hougaard and Carter's MSC model, Edmondson's psychological safety dimensions, and the U.S. Surgeon General's Five Essentials.

REQUIRED TEXTS

MAIN TEXT

The Mind of the Leader

Hougaard, R., & Carter, J. (2018). *How to Lead Yourself, Your People, and Your Organization for Extraordinary Results*. Harvard Business Review Press. ISBN 9781633693425.

PRACTICE

The Fearless Organization

Edmondson, A. C. (2018). *Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*. Wiley. ISBN 9781119477242.

REFLECTIVE

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle

Nagoski, E., & Nagoski, A. (2020). *Ballantine Books*. ISBN 9781984818324.

FRAMEWORK

The U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

U.S. Surgeon General. (2022). *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. [Free PDF — available on Canvas.]

Additional articles, videos, cases, and reflection materials will be provided through Canvas.

COURSE STRUCTURE & POLICIES

ONLINE FORMAT

This course combines synchronous Zoom sessions with asynchronous Canvas activities. Zoom sessions include discussion, case analysis, applied exercises, and teaching presentations. Canvas includes readings, videos, journal posts, weekly insights, and field activities. Students are expected to participate actively in both.

MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGY

Internet access, Canvas, Zoom, and Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat Reader. All are available on campus at no cost.

CREDIT EQUIVALENCY

4 graduate credits in Public Administration, Leadership Studies, Organizational Leadership, or Psychological Well-Being in Leadership.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE

AI tools may support learning — brainstorming, outlining, clarifying, organizing notes, and editing for grammar or readability. AI tools may not replace original reflection, analysis, or applied leadership thinking. Students must be able to explain and defend all submitted work as their own. Submitting AI-generated work as one's own violates Evergreen's academic integrity expectations.

ACCESSIBILITY & FAITH OBSERVANCE

Students requesting accommodations should contact faculty as early as possible and use Evergreen's support services as outlined in the Student Handbook. Students who will miss class for

a religious holiday or observance should notify faculty in writing within the first two weeks of the quarter.

EXPECTATIONS & EVALUATION

Learning in this course is interdependent, reflective, and rigorous. In alignment with Evergreen's Six Expectations — beginning with articulating and assuming responsibility for one's own work — students are expected to take ownership of their learning and development.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

- Participate actively in Zoom sessions and Canvas activities.
- Prepare for seminars and applied leadership exercises.
- Apply course concepts to real-world public, organizational, and civic contexts.
- Practice respectful, psychologically safe dialogue and protect confidentiality.
- Use the Leadership Intelligence framework to connect personal reflection, relational awareness, and system analysis.

Unexcused absences, repeated lateness, incomplete work, or violations of academic integrity may constitute grounds for loss of credit.

EVALUATION

Evaluation follows Evergreen's narrative model, considering attendance and participation; preparation and contribution to discussion; rigor of weekly insights and journal posts; depth of reflection and applied practice; demonstrated use of the three intelligences; and final synthesis and self-evaluation.

Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Partial	No Credit
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Students will be asked to reflect on the credits they believe they have earned. Faculty will provide timely feedback, mid-quarter feedback when appropriate, and a final narrative evaluation.

ASSIGNMENTS

WEEKLY LEARNING INSIGHTS · EVERY WEEK

Each week, students submit a short Canvas reflection connecting the week to Leadership Intelligence and the practices of mindful, selfless, and compassionate leadership.

- **Top Insight:** the week's most meaningful takeaway and why it matters.
- **Leadership Intelligence Connection:** how it links to Self, Human, System, or all three.
- **Extend Your Learning:** one external resource that expands or challenges the insight.
- **Leadership Application:** how the insight makes you more effective or sustainable as a leader.
- **Action:** one specific practice you will test or apply this week.

TEACH THE COMMUNITY: DEEP DIVE & SHORT PRESENTATION · DUE WEEK 05

Choose a topic that matters to you in leadership well-being — mindfulness, selflessness, compassion, burnout, emotional intelligence, psychological safety, boundaries, toxic leadership, or another relevant challenge. Use three references in synthesis: one course text, one scholarly

source, and one media source. Name the topic, connect the sources, analyze through Leadership Intelligence, and propose how leaders can apply the insight. Deliver a 5-minute teaching presentation.

LEADERSHIP WELL-BEING IN PRACTICE: APPLIED PROJECT · DUE WEEK 09

Examine a real leadership or organizational well-being challenge through Self, Human, and System Intelligence and through the three disciplines of mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion. Produce a one-page diagnostic: what is happening inside the leader, between people, and in the system conditions around them. Include evidence from Edmondson and the U.S. Surgeon General framework where relevant. Propose at least three concrete interventions implementable within ninety days.

- 6–8 page written analysis
- 5–7 minute teaching presentation

FINAL COURSE REFLECTION & SELF-EVALUATION · WEEK 10

In approximately 500–750 words, synthesize the term: key learning themes; growth in Self, Human, and System Intelligence; what you practiced and observed outside class; how mindful, selfless, and compassionate leadership changed your thinking; and one or two practices you intend to continue beyond the course.

WEEKLY MODULES

A compact weekly arc from self, to other, to system, and back to integrated practice.

01

Course Introduction: Caring for the Mind That Leads

Leadership, Psychological Well-Being, and the Leadership Intelligence Framework

Why does the mental health of leaders matter?

Orientation to the course and central thesis: leadership is not only skill, authority, or strategy, but psychological capacity. Students are introduced to Leadership Intelligence and to mindful, selfless, and compassionate leadership.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Introduction and Chapter 1
 - The MSC Leader
- U.S. Surgeon General Framework —
Introduction and Five Essentials overview
- Media: U.S. Surgeon General workplace well-being introduction

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

ALL THREE INTELLIGENCES

Orientation to all three intelligences. The week frames leader well-being as personal, relational, and systemic.

02 The Mind That Leads

Self Intelligence, Inner Stability, and Self-Awareness

How does the condition of my inner life shape the way I lead?

This week introduces Self Intelligence and the idea that the inner condition of the leader directly shapes outward leadership behavior. Students begin a field observation that will run the length of the course.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 2 — Understand Yourself
- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 3 — Mindfully Lead Yourself
- Media: Sinek — Why Good Leaders Make You Feel Safe

FIELD ACTIVITY

Leadership Well-Being Observation. Observe one leader throughout the course. Notice pressure, communication under stress, emotional presence or reactivity, and effects on others. Write: What I observed; What I think it may mean.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

SELF INTELLIGENCE

Students begin noticing how the inner condition of a leader affects outward behavior.

03 Leadership Under Pressure

Self Intelligence, Stress, Responsibility, and Emotional Load

What happens to leadership when pressure becomes chronic?

This week examines how pressure affects attention, judgment, emotional regulation, and the self leaders bring into the room. Students distinguish short-term stress from patterns of depletion.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 4 — Selfless Self-Leadership
- Nagoski & Nagoski, Chapters 1-2 — Complete the Cycle and #Persist
- Media: How Stress Affects Your Brain

FIELD ACTIVITY

Mapping Leadership Stress. Reflect on a situation where you felt responsible and under pressure. Observe the stress source and effects on thinking, communication, body, and relationships. Write: Stressors; Stress responses.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

SELF INTELLIGENCE

Students identify personal stress responses and the internal effects of leadership pressure.

04 Compassion for the Depleted Leader

Self Intelligence, Recovery, and Sustainable Leadership

How do I know when leadership strength has become leadership depletion?

This week reframes self-care as a leadership discipline. Compassion is applied to the leader's limits, recovery needs, boundaries, and capacity to remain steady under responsibility.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 5 — Lead Yourself with Compassion
- Nagoski & Nagoski, Chapter 3 — Meaning
- Media: The Power of Mindfulness: What You Practice Grows Stronger

FIELD ACTIVITY

Depletion Signals in Leadership. Continue observing your leader. Look for exhaustion, reduced patience, loss of motivation, decision fatigue, withdrawal, or overfunctioning. Write: Signs of depletion; Conditions contributing to depletion.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

SELF + SYSTEM INTELLIGENCE

Depletion is both inner experience and a signal that conditions may need to change.

05 Emotional Intelligence and the Leadership Self

Self Intelligence, Emotional Regulation, and Decision-Making

What am I feeling, and how is it shaping what I see, say, and decide?

This week moves from self-awareness into relational awareness. Students examine how emotions, interpretations, and the nervous system shape communication, trust, and choices under pressure.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 6 — Understand Your People
- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 7 — Mindful Leadership
- Media: Brown — The Power of Vulnerability

DEEP DIVE ASSIGNMENT · DUE THIS WEEK

Analyze one emotionally charged leadership situation through emotional awareness, interpretation, leadership response, and alternative choice. Deep Dive post and 5-minute presentation due.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

SELF + HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

Emotional awareness and regulation bridge inner leadership and relational trust.

06

Recovery, Community, and the Discipline of Sustainability

Self Intelligence, Human Intelligence, Boundaries, and Stress-Cycle Completion

What practices help me recover so I can lead with clarity and steadiness?

Students examine recovery as a daily leadership practice and community as a condition of well-being. The week connects selfless leadership with boundaries that prevent overfunctioning.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 8 — Selfless Leadership
- Nagoski & Nagoski, Chapters 5-6 — Connect
- Media: McGonigal — How to Make Stress Your Friend

FIELD ACTIVITY

Personal Recovery Audit. For three days, track sleep, rest, movement, hydration, decompression, social connection, boundaries, joy, meaning, and stillness. Write: What drains me; What restores me.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

SELF + HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

Recovery is a leadership discipline; connection is both a personal need and a community condition.

07

Caring for Others Without Losing Yourself

Human Intelligence, Compassion, Boundaries, and Emotional Labor

How can I care deeply without carrying what is not mine to carry?

This week focuses on compassionate leadership: empathy with boundaries, care without dependency, and emotional labor that does not deplete. Students examine the conditions for sustained care.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 9 — Compassionate Leadership
- Nagoski & Nagoski, Chapter 7 — What Makes You Stronger
- Media: Empathy and Sympathy

FIELD ACTIVITY

Boundaries in Leadership. Observe a leadership or support situation. Notice care, listening, empowerment or dependency, boundaries, overwhelm, and calm. Write: Healthy care behaviors; Boundary risks.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

Leaders care through empathy, communication, trust, compassion, and boundaries.

08

Psychological Safety and the Supportive Culture*Human Intelligence and System Intelligence**What kind of culture allows people to be honest, supported, and well?*

The course moves from leader behavior to organizational conditions. Students connect psychological safety with designing cultures where people can speak honestly, learn, recover, and contribute.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Chapter 10 — Understand Your Organization
- Edmondson, Part 1 — The Power of Psychological Safety
- Surgeon General Framework — Essential 1: Protection from Harm
- Media: Building a Psychologically Safe Workplace

FIELD ACTIVITY

Psychological Safety Scan. Observe a team, workplace, classroom, meeting, or public organization. Look for safety and risk. Write: Signals of psychological safety; Signals of psychological risk.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

HUMAN + SYSTEM INTELLIGENCE

Psychological safety is both relational and systemic.

09

From Self-Care to System Care

Leadership Intelligence Integration

How do I care for myself, care for others, and help build systems that support well-being?

Synthesis week. Students bring together Leadership Intelligence, mindful leadership, selfless leadership, compassionate leadership, psychological safety, and workplace mental health frameworks.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Chapters 11-13 — Mindful, Selfless, and Compassionate Organization
- Edmondson, Parts 2-3 — Psychological Safety at Work and Creating a Fearless Organization
- Surgeon General Framework — Essentials 2-5 revisited
- Nagoski & Nagoski, closing chapter — Grow Mighty

FIELD ACTIVITY · APPLIED PROJECT DUE

Leadership Well-Being Integration. Review your notes on the observed leader or situation. Write: Caring for self; Caring for others; Caring for the system.

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

ALL THREE INTELLIGENCES

Students move from personal practice to relational care to system design.

10

Final Reflection and Self-Evaluation

Synthesis, Responsibility, and Forward Practice

What does it mean to care for the mind that leads?

Students submit the Final Course Reflection and Self-Evaluation, synthesizing Weekly Insights, field observations, applied project learning, and personal leadership development.

READINGS & MEDIA

- Hougaard & Carter, Afterword — Leadership for a Hard Future
- Review Weekly Insights and field notes
- Final Course Reflection, approximately 500-750 words
- Final seminar — peer teaching and integration

LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

ALL THREE INTELLIGENCES

Psychologically healthy leadership requires the integration of Self, Human, and System Intelligence — practiced continuously, not completed.

This course asks something real of each student. It is not only about learning concepts — it is about practicing them. The most important laboratory is your own leadership life: the decisions you make, the stress you carry, the way you show up for others, and the conditions you help create. Bring honesty and care to that work.

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