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The Impact of Leadership Involvement on College Students' Experience and Wellbeing

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THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP INVOLVEMENT ON COLLEGE STUDENTS'
EXPERIENCE AND WELLBEING

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business
Department of Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Tricia Saunders

May 2017

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**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Patricia Lee Saunders

entitled

The impact of Leadership Involvement on a College Student's Experience and Wellbeing

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations impact students' college experience and wellbeing. The questions that guided the research were (a) how does a student's involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations impact how he or she views the college experience, and (b) how is a student's sense of wellbeing affected by his or her participation in leadership positions? Through semi-structured interviews, six major themes emerged: mentorship, past experiences, increase in leadership skills, being in relationships with others, leadership identity development, and difficult transitions. The essence of this study is that a student's involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations has a positive and formative impact on a student's overall college experience and wellbeing. A discussion of the connections between involvement, leadership, and wellbeing is provided, in addition to research limitations, implications for future research, and implications for practice.

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I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Leadership can be defined as a purposeful, personal, collective, and focused process of providing direction for others (Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan, 2006a, 2006b; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Guthrie, Jones, Osteen, & Hu, 2013; Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007). Students who participate in leadership positions can gain life skills that will transcend their college experience (Dugan, 2011). As a result, students who choose to take an active role in their growth while in college have a positive connection between involvement in leadership positions and their collegiate experience (Astin, 1993; Dugan & Komives, 2010).

Astin's involvement theory suggests the various forms of involvement have a different effect on an individual's experience (Astin, 1993). Astin's (1984) "theory of involvement emphasizes active participation of the student in the learning process" and encourages educators to focus their attention on the actions, effort and time students devote to their learning and overall development (p. 522). Students who spend sufficient time and energy in clubs and organizations gain more from their college experience (Astin, 1984, 1985; Case, 2011; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Holzweiss, Rahn, & Wickline, 2007; Huang & Chang, 2004; Kuh et al., 1991; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wolf-Wendel & Ruel, 1999).

Astin (1993) placed a strong emphasis on the correlation between leadership development and involvement in all aspects of life—mind, body, and spirit. A student's perspective of wellbeing shapes his or her college experience (Archer, Probert, & Gage, 1987; Hermon & Davis, 2004; Schreiner, 2010b). However, busyness can have a considerable impact on various aspects of life, especially when students spend approximately four to eight hours a week in their leadership roles. As a result, it is important to maintain a balanced lifestyle (Ardell & Langdon, 1989). Chandler, Holden, and Kolander (1992) suggested that focusing on the social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and occupational components of wellbeing is critical to maintaining a holistic approach to wellbeing. This holistic approach to a student's wellbeing greatly impacts his or her collegiate experience and allows healthy leaders to foster growth and motivation in others (Bass, 1990).

In particular, students actively involved in their leadership positions in clubs and organizations gain more from their collegiate experience, which impacts how they thrive in college. According to Schreiner (2010a), a student thrives if he or she is fully engaged and submersed in his or her environment. The concept of thriving also plays a significant role in how a student perceives his or her overall experience and health while in college.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore how leadership positions in clubs and organizations impact students' overall college experience and wellbeing. Therefore, in order for institutions to understand better the benefit of campus programs and activities, greater attention should be given to examining the student experience in regard to a student's leadership development and overall wellbeing.

Defining Terms

The combination of a student's involvement in leadership positions on campus either help or hinder how a student perceives his or her wellbeing. Defining involvement, leadership, and wellbeing provides context for this study.

Involvement. Astin's (1993) involvement theory suggests the time and effort a student actively participates in activities and co-curricular programs strongly impacts his or her growth and development in college (Astin, 1984, 1993; Case, 2011; Kuh et al., 1991; Kuh, 1995, 2009). While academic engagement plays an important role in a student's college experience, involvement with non-academic campus organizations also affects a student's development throughout college (Holzweiss et al., 2007). Foubert and Grainger (2006) stated, “. . . it seems that involvement in student organizations has a strong association with psychosocial development, particularly on students establishing and clarifying purpose, educational involvement, career planning, life management, and cultural participation” (p. 180). For this study, involvement was defined as active participation in a non-academic, co-curricular campus club or organization.

Leadership. Leadership development is a critical component of a student's campus experience. Astin and Astin (2000) stated that the purpose of leadership development is “to empower students to become agents of positive social change in the larger society” (p. 19). Further, leadership development is a process that is an intentional, relational, transformative, meaningful, collaborative partnership between an individual and a group of people (Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan 2006a, 2006b; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Haber, 2011; Wielkiewicz, 2000).

Leaders have the opportunity to gain experience with planning, promoting, and implementing campus programming events on campus in addition to directing a group of peers within the organization. A student's involvement in his or her leadership role greatly impacts his or her overall wellbeing. For this study, leadership was defined as holding a position in student organizations, student government, or community service.

Wellbeing. Thriving is a critical component of whole-person development, a healthy lifestyle, and especially students' wellbeing (Longman, 2012). Wellbeing was an essential part of this study as it greatly impacts a student's involvement in leadership positions on campus. A holistic understanding of wellbeing guided this study, referring to the social, cognitive, spiritual, physical, and behavioral components of a student's overall mental health during his or her time in college (Archer et al., 1987; Gellin, 2003; Hermon & Davis, 2004).

Research Questions

The questions that guided this research were:

1. How does a student's involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations impact how he or she views the college experience?
2. How is a student's sense of wellbeing affected by his or her participation in leadership positions?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Evaluating the student experience in clubs and organizations is a complex task. However, it is essential in determining how leadership positions impact students' overall college experience and wellbeing. The following literature review examines research related to student involvement theory, leadership development, and wellbeing in relation to the student experience.

Involvement

Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcome model provided a conceptual framework for "studying and examining college student development" (p. 7). The purpose of this model was to observe the impact of the environment on a student's college experience. First, input refers to the characteristics, qualities, and developmental level of the student when first arriving to the institution. Second, the environment denotes the various programs, leadership activities, policies, and campus climate to which the student is exposed during his or her collegiate experience. Lastly, outcome relates to the developmental growth that results from being immersed in the college environment. The more interaction students have with their peers, the more invested students are in participating and being involved in clubs and organizations on campus (Foubert & Grainger, 2006).

The student involvement theory places an emphasis on engagement in campus activities impacting the cognitive and affective gains of students' overall development (Astin, 1985; Case, 2011). Astin (1984) established five postulates that provide a foundational explanation of the various elements and characteristics of involvement:

(1) involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects, (2) involvement occurs along a continuum and is based on the individual, (3) involvement includes both quantitative and qualitative features, (4) the levels of involvement—holding a leadership position versus being a general member of an organization, and (5) the effectiveness of an educational policy or practice . . . [in order] to increase involvement. (p. 519)

Involvement theory focuses entirely on behaviors or participation rather than on the motivations that prompt such activities. Astin's theory allows administrative leaders to recognize the importance of students' engagement during their collegiate years. As a result, students obtain more from their college experience if they are involved in educationally purposeful activities such as participating in campus organizations (Astin, 1984, 1985; Case, 2011; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Holzweiss et al., 2007; Huang & Chang, 2004; Kuh et al., 1991; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wolf-Wendel & Ruel, 1999).

Traditional pedagogical theories. Traditional pedagogical theories offer further explanation of how student learning is enhanced by a student's involvement on campus. Additionally, these pedagogical theories help student affairs administrators comprehend the connection between student development and the individual student experience. The three main traditional pedagogical theories are subject-matter theory,

resource theory (Astin, 1984), and individualized theory (Chickering & Associates, 1981). Subject-matter theory focuses on specialization with a strong emphasis on content. Students may only feel the need to participate in organizations that directly impact their future career goals, such as academic co-curricular programs, and specific leadership positions (Astin, 1984). Resource theory includes a plethora of perspectives and sources to enhance and strengthen students' learning process. Students may be able to advance in their development if appropriate resources are set in place. The individualized theory recognizes that every student learns at a different rate and may need additional resources to be successful in college. Similarly, the individualized theory illustrates that there are multiple approaches to learning and that growth and development are self-paced in nature. These traditional pedagogical theories, as well as Astin's involvement theory, provide a platform to understand the value of student involvement in clubs and organizations.

Student involvement in clubs and organizations. Student involvement in clubs and organizations requires the student's commitment and effort to be an active agent in his or her learning process. Kuh and colleagues (1991) explained,

the more time and effort students invest in the learning process and the more intensely they engage in their own education, the greater will be their growth and achievement, their satisfaction with their educational experiences, and their persistence in college, and the more likely they are to continue learning. (p. 10)

Individuals are active agents in their developmental process and are constantly making meaning out of the world around them (Schreiner, 2010a, 2010b). Students can build interpersonal and intrapersonal skills when actively participating in clubs and

organizations. In particular, students learn how to communicate with others, find purpose in their community, gain self-confidence, and work with others on a team (Schreiner, 2010b). Students have a more positive collegiate experience if they take an active role in their learning, participate in co-curricular organizations (Kuh et al., 1991), and engage physically, mentally, and emotionally (Ringgenberg, 1989). In addition, Richmond (1986) stated that encouraging students to take ownership of their learning helps them feel valued and find purpose in their campus community.

Students involved in campus activities and actively participating in their campus environment tend to have a more positive and enjoyable college experience (Astin, 1985; Holzweiss et al., 2007; Kuh et al., 1991; Wolf-Wendel & Ruel, 1999). However, Kuh (2009) and Pace (1984) argued that each type of involvement may play a different educational role in a student's overall college experience. Further, Kuh (2009) stated that "student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 683). Thus, students gain more from their collegiate experience by spending their time wisely and engaging in educational activities in which they can think critically and further develop. As a result, optimal development and growth occur when a student takes an active role in his or her college experience (Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stanford, 1992).

Researchers found that previous high school experiences, institutional loyalty, residential status, and student engagement were all associated with a student's involvement in clubs and organizations (Astin, 1993; Berger & Milem, 1999; Case, 2011; Dugan, 2011; Kapp, 1979; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students with prior

participation in high school programs seem to maintain similar interests and sustain their involvement in other co-curricular activities while in college (Case, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In addition, research suggested that residential students are more involved on campus than those who commute to campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A recent study conducted by Holzweiss et al. (2007) reported involvement in non-academic and academic organizations. According to the study, 52% were involved only in non-academic organizations, 25% participated in strictly academic organizations, and 25% were involved in both types of organizations. Lloyd (2006) discovered that 71% of students reported that their participation in clubs and organizations positively contributed to their success in college (as cited in Wooten, Hunt, LeDuc, & Poskus, 2012). As a result, students who invest efficient time and energy into participating in co-curricular activities gain a variety of positive benefits.

A student's involvement in campus clubs and organizations positively correlates with high academic achievement, thereby impacting grade point average, school engagement, and retention (Chang, 2002; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Holzweiss et al., 2007). Students find fulfillment with their institution (Berger & Milem, 1999; Chang, 2002) and feel known in their community through interactions with faculty and peers (Berger & Milem, 1999; Case, 2011; Chang, 2002; Kapp, 1979; Kuh et al., 1991). In addition, research indicates that students continually participate in organizations for their own personal benefit and leadership development (Holzweiss et al., 2007).

Leadership

Leadership development is an important outcome of student involvement in clubs and organizations. Dungan and Komives (2010) described leadership as “purposeful,

collaborative, and a values-based process that results in positive social change” (p. 526). Leaders are those who believe in themselves and set out to impact their organizations (Habecker, 2006). McCauley, Velsor and Ruderman (2010) stated that “being engaged in a developmental experience can enhance a person’s ability to learn, and being more readily able to learn can lead one to draw more development from any set experience” (p. 5). Students are supported and challenged when they participate in leadership opportunities (McCauley et al., 2010; Smith & Chenoweth, 2015) and recognize how they can serve the community at large (Garcia & Bay, 2011). Astin (1993) argued that there exists a strong connection between leadership development and involvement since leadership centers on how the mind, body, and spirit interpret and respond to the collegiate environment.

A clear understanding of leadership was essential to this study as it positively correlates with students’ involvement in clubs and organizations. Leadership is a relational, collaborative, beneficial, vision-driven, and intentional process (Allen, Stelzner, & Wielkiewicz, 1998; Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan, 2006a, 2006b; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Guthrie et al., 2013; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2007). Similarly, leadership plays an essential role in preparing and developing students to make a difference in their college community (Kruger, 2002). Students who actively participate in leadership activities are more likely to have a natural desire for learning and can lead others based on his or her personal experiences (McCauley et al., 2010).

Models of leadership. Four key models of leadership were relevant to this study: emergent perspective model, relational leadership model (Komives et al., 2007), social

change model (Komives & Wagner, 2009), and the leadership development model (Guthrie et al., 2013).

Emergent perspective model. First, the emergent perspective focuses on group collaboration, teamwork (Komives et al., 2007), and an increase in self-awareness—realizing his or her potential and developing a greater sense of purpose and self-authorship (Komives & Wagner, 2009; Thompson, 2006). Furthermore, the emergent perspective model defines leadership as a multi-layered process of serving the greater community, in addition to individual growth and development (Haber, 2011). Leadership is reciprocal in nature and can be considered a group effort by being process-oriented.

Relational leadership model. The relational leadership model emphasizes five key components of leadership: this model sees good leadership as “purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical and process-oriented” (Haber, 2011, p. 66). The relational model also conceptualizes that positive change drives students’ growth as a leader by increasing their focus on the big picture. Students operating according to the relational model seek to enable others to act and get involved in campus activities. Inclusivity and humility characterize success and collaboration within this model.

Social change model. The social change model stresses that leadership is inherently comprised of group interaction and “is inclusive of all people regardless of their roles” (Haber, 2011, p. 67). Individual values and an awareness of oneself contribute to the group interaction and are critical components in cultivating growth in students. Group relationships and understanding the individual role are key components to the social change model.

Leadership development model. Finally, the leadership development model places an emphasis on the ability to learn from a variety of leadership experiences (McCauley et al., 2010). The leadership development model is critical in shaping individuals throughout their college experiences by focusing on group relationships and collaboration (Guthrie et al., 2013). Student group experiences enhance and cultivate leadership skills in those students who participate in clubs and organizations (Dugan, 2011; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). Moreover, the four models highlight that, while leadership is considered a group phenomenon, it also reflects the individual experience and is an important aspect of a student's involvement in leadership.

Leadership skills developed. There is a positive correlation between the college experience and increased levels of leadership capabilities (Astin, 1993; Dugan & Komives, 2010). Logue, Hutchens, and Hector (2005) stated that "leadership experiences of students, involving holding an office, position of responsibility, or active membership status within extracurricular organizations, are directly proportional to the richness and magnitude of learning experiences, as well as to their personal development during college years" (p. 393). Students who engage in leadership opportunities gain practical experiences in time management, decision-making, program planning, implementation, and the development of critical thinking (Dugan, 2011; Kuh et al., 1991; Smith & Chenoweth, 2015). However, Dugan (2011) noted that students involved in leadership positions feel a sense of purpose, gain cognitive maturity and practical competence, develop life skills, and are more satisfied with their college experience.

Wellbeing

Being involved on campus can significantly impact a student's social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual wellbeing (Archer et al., 1987). Students who are more involved are more likely to develop critical thinking skills and grow a deeper awareness of self, others, and their communities (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Dugan, 2013; Gellin, 2003; Hermon & Davis, 2004). Wellbeing was an essential part of this study as it greatly impacts how students engage in their leadership roles. Archer et al. (1987) mentioned that being in relationship with others and engaging in co-curricular activities impacts a student's overall wellbeing. In particular, this section provides a context for how wellbeing relates to involvement in leadership positions in campus activities.

In the Spring 2014 reference group executive summary of the American College Health Association National College Health Assessment, approximately 55% of student participants reported having some variety of mental health concerns. More specifically, 59% felt very lonely, 62% experienced extreme sadness, and 54% felt overwhelmingly anxious within the last year. These numbers prompt a closer examination of a student's overall wellbeing with specific attention to self-efficacy and self-worth. Students desire to feel needed and wanted in their community, regardless of their involvement around campus. Research indicated that extreme isolation and lack of belonging to a community on campus are negative components impacting student satisfaction with an institution (Hermon & Davis, 2004).

Student involvement and engagement in clubs and organizations can positively impact self-esteem, mental health, wellbeing, and a sense of belonging in their

community (Chang, 2002; Dugan, 2006a, 2006b; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Hermon & Davis, 2004; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students come to college with preconceived notions, life experiences, and perspectives of the world around them that directly impact their college experience (Longman, 2012; Schreiner, 2010b). Balancing physical, social, emotional, and cognitive components is critical in order to live a life of optimal wellness (Ardell & Langdon, 1989).

Bass (1990) explained that mentally healthy leaders foster growth and motivation in others, develop a sense of identity and purpose in their leadership, and are actively involved in the campus community. However, in order to live a healthy lifestyle, it is important to strive for a holistic approach to wellbeing. According to Chandler et al. (1992), “[O]ptimum wellness exists when each of these five dimensions [social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and occupational] are present” (p. 171).

Factors of wellbeing. Students respond differently to similar situations and “evaluate conditions based on their unique expectations, values, and previous experiences” (Hermon & David, 2004, p. 277). Consistent factors affect a student’s sense of wellbeing. First, students tend to focus a lot of their energy on occupational wellness with specific attention to employability, gathering skills and experiences in order to obtain a job after college. Archer et al. (1987) found that students believe the physical element of wellbeing has the most impact on their mental health. In addition, 43% of the students they surveyed conveyed a significant level of worry, 40% reported a lack of sleep, and 39% indicated they struggled with procrastination. On the other-hand, students who are in control gain confidence in themselves and demonstrate a greater

sense of self-efficacy regarding their ability to succeed in college (Hermon & Davis, 2004). Students gain a sense of belonging and feel like they thrive in all facets of life when their wellbeing is balanced.

Thriving. The concept of thriving stresses the importance of appropriate self-efficacy and community engagement. As a result, this community engagement fosters positive individual and community functioning, thus offering a platform to compare students who flourish to those who simply survive and go through the motions (Schreiner, 2010b). Schreiner (2010a) defined thriving in college “as being fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally in the college experience” (p. 4). Thriving students focus on multiple elements of college, not just academic success. Students who blossom are actively participating in their learning process, setting goals and prioritizing commitments accordingly, interacting with others in their environment, and maintaining a positive attitude throughout the developmental process (Schreiner, 2013).

According to Schreiner (2010b), “[T]hriving college students not only are academically successful, they also experience a sense of community and a level of psychological wellbeing that contributes to their persistence to graduation and allows them to gain maximum benefit from being in college” (p. 4). Thus, students who thrive actively engage in their learning and overall college experience. Thriving provides a framework for students to flourish rather than just get by and merely survive. In addition, students thrive when whole-person development is a key component to their learning both in and outside of the classroom (Astin, 1993; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Smith & Chenoweth, 2015).

Schreiner, Louis, and Nelson (2012) provided three main areas of thriving that explain how students gain maximum benefit from their time in college. First, academic thriving is characterized by how invested the student is in his or her learning process and puts an emphasis on a student's motivation to succeed (Schreiner, 2010b). Secondly, intrapersonal thriving includes having an optimistic view of the future and being able to see the big picture. Students who thrive tend to have a more positive outlook on life and are more satisfied with their college experience. Because of this, students are "less likely to overreact and therefore handle stress better" (p. 5). Third, interpersonal thriving focuses on the relational components that relate to a student's success in college. Students who have a strong friend group, maintain a growth mindset, and can relate well with others are generally more satisfied with their individual experience. These elements of thriving identify a framework that is helpful in evaluating a student's overall wellbeing throughout his or her college experience.

Summary

The student experience plays a vital role in a student's growth and development while in college. Dugan (2006a) argued that there is "a need to purposefully shape how we engage in and structure leadership experiences for students" (p. 22). In order for student affairs administrators to understand the importance of involvement in clubs and organizations, specific attention should be placed on the implications of leadership positions. This study sought to provide insight into how serving in a leadership position influences students' overall college experience and wellbeing.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Student involvement plays a significant role in the college experience. While there is some research on student involvement, current research fails to examine student participation in leadership positions, specifically in clubs and organizations (Foubert & Grainger, 2006). Additionally, little research has been conducted on leadership development regarding impact of the level of student engagement in co-curricular programs (Astin, 1984; Stanford, 1992). Therefore, involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations must be explored.

Approach

This study explored how leadership positions in clubs and organizations influence a student's overall college experience and wellbeing. A phenomenological research design was chosen for this study in order to describe and understand an individual's lived experience (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenological research consists of what an individual experienced and how his or her context has influenced the experience. In this research design, the researcher intentionally separated from the research by "bracketing one's experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Phenomenological research emphasizes the meaning of the shared experiences of the individuals and, in the present study, allowed the researcher to approach the data with fresh eyes.

Participants

This study was conducted at a small Midwestern, faith-based, liberal arts institution with a student population of approximately 2,000 students. The college is a predominantly residential university with first-year students through seniors integrated into each residence hall. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select twelve students to participate in the research. In purposeful sampling, a “researcher intentionally selects individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” and ensures that the individuals selected for this study can speak to their leadership experience (Creswell, 2012, p. 206).

The student affairs staff provided the researcher with names of potential students who could articulate their leadership experiences. The researcher then emailed the list of potential students and received 12 responses. The 12 students were then invited to participate in individual, semi-structured interviews. Prior to interviewing the participants, a pilot interview was conducted to test the interview protocol and evaluate the appropriateness of each interview question. The students ranged from juniors to seniors and had experiences in community service, student activities, and student government. Of the 12 participants, 7 were involved in student activities or student government, and 5 participants were involved in community service. Four participants were male, and eight participants were female. Three of the 12 participants were not currently in their leadership role. In addition, 8 of the 12 participants had been in their role for over a year. More information about the participants is listed below in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Information

<u>Alias</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gen.</u>	<u>YR</u>	<u>Leadership Position</u>	<u>Time in Role</u>	<u>Hrs. Per Wk. (Busy Season)</u>
Participant 1*	21	F	SR	Comm. Service	1 ½ years	6-8 (12-14)
Participant 2*	21	F	SR	Comm. Service	1 ½ years	6-8 (10-12)
Participant 3	21	F	SR	Comm. Service	3 years	5
Participant 4	22	F	SR	Stud. Act./Gov't	2 years	6 (10)
Participant 5*	21	M	JR	Comm. Service	1 year	4 (10)
Participant 6	21	F	SR	Stud. Act./Gov't	10 months	8 (12-15)
Participant 7	21	F	SR	Stud. Act./Gov't	7 months	5-10 (10-15)
Participant 8	21	M	JR	Stud. Act./Gov't	1 year	4 (15-20)
Participant 9	21	M	SR	Stud. Act./Gov't	10 months	8-10
Participant 10	22	M	SR	Stud. Act./Gov't	3 years	5-6 (10-20)
Participant 11	21	F	JR	Comm. Service	1 ½ years	4
Participant 12	21	F	SR	Stud. Act./Gov't	2 years	N/A

Note. *Participants who are not currently in their leadership role

Procedure and Data Analysis

Upon receiving IRB approval, student affairs staff and potential participants were contacted. As mentioned earlier, 12 participants responded to the emails, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews lasted 35 minutes to an hour and 35 minutes, with the average interview around 52 minutes. The interviews were conducted

in a private room so that students felt free to answer questions regarding their experiences in their leadership positions.

Students were asked to sign a consent form prior to each individual interview. Participants were asked questions regarding their experiences in their leadership positions and how those experiences had impacted their overall college experience and wellbeing. The researcher audio recorded and transcribed each student interview. All recordings were deleted after the interviewer completed each transcription. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. The consent form and interview protocol are provided in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Once all interviews were completed and transcribed, the researcher coded the responses for general themes. According to Creswell (2012), coding is the process of “making sense of the data” (p. 243). The researcher analyzed each interview in order to identify significant statements, quotes, or ideas that represent the phenomenon known as horizontalization (Creswell, 2007). Clusters of meaning were created to form key themes from the data. Member checking was used in order to confirm that the researcher’s main themes, interpretations, and perceptions of the interview were accurate (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2007) posited that “the main themes of the research will help to develop the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the participants’ experience creating the ‘essence of the phenomenon’” (p. 62). Participants were invited to review findings from their interviews in order to make corrections and clarifications immediately following the coding and theming process. From the significant statements and themes of the 12 interviews, an essence emerged. An essence is the “the passage [that] focuses on the common experience of the participants” (Creswell, 2012, p. 82).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how leadership positions in clubs and organizations impact students' overall college experience and wellbeing. This exploration allows student affairs administrators and students to understand more fully the benefits of involvement in leadership positions in campus activities. Further, findings from this phenomenological design provide student organization advisors a means to understand the impact of a student's individual leadership experiences and to see if a student's motivation and development is affected by participating in specific leadership positions. Overall, the findings from this study also give student organization advisors of student leaders clear direction on how to design leadership experience and training in order to leverage the student experience for maximum wellbeing.

Chapter 4

Results

The results of this study describe the impact of students' involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations on their overall college experience and wellbeing. The questions that guided the research were (a) how does a student's involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations impact how he or she views the college experience, and (b) how is a student's sense of well-being affected by his or her participation in leadership positions?

Participants were willing to engage in meaningful conversations about their leadership experiences, adding richness to the following findings and discussion. Six major themes emerged from the interviews: (a) mentorship, (b) the importance of past experiences, (c) increase in leadership skills, (d) being in relationships with others, (e) leadership identity development, and (f) difficult transitions. In addition, 6 subthemes also emerged from the 12 interviews. The themes were determined by frequency and intensity of each interview response. The themes and subthemes are discussed in order of greatest frequency to least frequency and answer the research questions in a sequential manner. An essence was formed from these themes.

Theme 1: Mentorship

Mentorship was a significant theme that developed from the interviews. Participants described mentors as people who encourage, challenge, support and speak

into the lives of others. Participants expressed feeling grateful for their mentorship relationships, especially when feeling stressed or overwhelmed by the leadership role. All 12 participants discussed mentorship relationships with graduate assistants, student affairs staff, professors, service trip leaders, and upperclassmen. Each participant mentioned the importance of learning from someone with a depth of knowledge and breadth of professional experience in student affairs.

Participants referenced mentorship relationships in formal and informal settings. Students expressed having graduate students and student development staff as mentors, in addition to their professors and service trip leaders. For example, Participant 5 stated, “The college is extremely fortunate to have the [graduate] program in place . . . you know having those people that are more mature and have been through the college experience.” Similarly, Participant 7 mentioned she greatly enjoyed mentorship, specifically “meeting with [graduate students], it’s really fun . . . and learning from them and having a mentor relationship or friendship with them.” Additionally, each participant reported meeting regularly with his or her supervisor to discuss upcoming programming events and leadership development concepts, in addition to the interpersonal component of the mentor relationship. Participant 1 indicated the institution does a phenomenal job “setting up mentors for every student leadership position as well as a chain of command,” in order to make sure students are aware of the big picture of student development.

Student participants described having a positive and formative mentorship experience because of the people who spoke into their lives and encouraged them to apply for their leadership positions. As a result, participants hoped to reciprocate the same mentorship relationship they were given to other students on campus. Participant 8

described this by sharing his favorite part of his leadership role is “being able to speak into other peoples’ lives and call them to leadership.” Participants 1 and 3 expressed student affairs staff were encouraging and thoughtfully invested in students’ success and overall engagement in their leadership roles, which prompted a positive leadership experience. The main theme of the importance of a variety of mentorship relationships was best described by Participant 7: “I think mentoring has been . . . a huge part of developing who I am . . . and has given me another opportunity to learn and grow from other students around me who are in leadership roles, the GAs and [the staff].”

Theme 2: The Importance of Past Experiences

Leadership involvement is often determined based on the importance of previous experiences that shape one’s perceptions and view of leadership. Of the 12 students interviewed, 11 mentioned the importance of past experiences and expanded on how those experiences impacted their involvement in leadership positions in college. Most of the participants explained their previous experience in high school leadership positions naturally helped them maintain their involvement throughout their collegiate experience. Participant 10 shared that his involvement in student council in high school was both positive and negative, leading him to replicate and forgo certain leadership characteristics in his current leadership position from those experiences. On the other hand, while Participant 12 was not engaged in co-curricular programming in high school, she expressed a sense of excitement knowing there were so many great organizations and different opportunities to get involved in while in college.

Other participants mentioned how their family background and childhood upbringing had a strong impact on their continual involvement and personal growth.

Participants expressed previous participation in mission trips and jobs while growing up provided a platform for them to want to continue to engage in leadership positions throughout their collegiate experience. Participant 8 discussed in his interview “how the past drives the future,” describing how reflecting on past experiences provides new opportunities for future growth and development.

Theme 3: Increase in Leadership Skills

Another emergent theme in the interviews was the increase in leadership skills. Ten of the 12 participants discussed the importance of growing in their leadership capabilities and how those skills impacted their work in their positions. Two subthemes emerged: (a) perceived cognitive and attitudinal progress and (b) teamwork skills.

Perceived cognitive and attitudinal progress. Of the 10 participants who said they experienced an increase in leadership skills, 8 specifically mentioned cognitive and attitudinal progress. This progress occurred in the following areas with the number of participants who indicated each area in parentheses: willingness to fail (4), seeing the big picture (3), asking good questions (3), listening well (3), curiosity to learn and grow (3), growth mindset (2), and problem solving (2).

As noted from the list above, four of these eight participants viewed a willingness to fail as an important aspect of perceived cognitive and attitudinal progress. For example, Participant 10 shared a story of how his leadership team planned an event to which no one came. He felt discouraged and defeated but began to ask good questions of how to improve for the future. As a result, Participant 10 learned “how to fail and how to fail well.” Participants noted much of their growth has come out of failure.

Three of the eight participants mentioned seeing the big picture, asking good questions, listening well, and having a curiosity to learn were key elements to developing critical thinking skills. Participant 6 discussed the theme of seeing the big picture and described how her organization focused on big picture items such as hospitality and generosity when planning events. The theme of asking good questions appeared in interviews when participants expressed a genuine desire to learn more and felt challenged in their leadership positions. Participant 3 best exemplified this when she shared, “I think the position has allowed me to ask myself a lot of hard questions . . . but those questions . . . push me towards more self-awareness.”

While a growth mindset was only mentioned in two interviews, it emerged as a main theme throughout the two individual interviews and merits noting. Participant 8 recounted how a growth mindset can be applied to life outside of college: “We’re a learning community. We’re in a growth mindset [department] . . . I think that aspect of growth mindset is central to my learning this year and I’m going to take that with me forever.”

Teamwork skills. All 10 participants who mentioned an increase in leadership skills also discussed various teamwork abilities that helped them in their leadership positions. From those 10 interviews, 9 teamwork skills emerged in the following areas with the number of participants who indicated each area in parentheses: leading meetings and a staff (5), communication skills (4), working on a team (4), delegation (3), confrontation (2), organization (2), collaboration (2), hiring a staff (1), and time management (1).

Of the 10 interviews, 5 participants mentioned the importance of learning how to effectively lead meetings and manage a team. Some participants said leading a group prompted growth and development. Participant 3 described what she learned in her leadership position: “[This position has] increased my responsibility and communication skills. I’ve learned about working on a team. . . . I’ve also learned a lot about autonomy, about co-laboring, balancing out skills, the importance of communication, [and] learning to say no.” Overall, Participant 3 expressed she learned much from her leadership role that she can take with her after college.

Additionally, students learned about confrontation and constructive criticism and how they relate when working on a team. Participant 6 summed up what she learned stating, “I think basic things like how to run a meeting well, how to take criticism well, how to give criticism well. All of those things I hope to [use] in leadership positions in the workforce.” While collaboration and delegation were not mentioned as frequently as the others, the participants stressed the importance of dividing tasks and collaborating with one another to complete a task. For example, Participant 2 stated, “Learning how to share that role well and lean on each other and support each other, that was essential in succeeding.” Students expressed the importance of learning how to delegate when working with others on a team.

Theme 4: Being in Relationships with Others

All 12 participants mentioned the theme of being in relationship with others as a critical component of their leadership roles and college experiences. Two subthemes contributed to the theme of being in relationship with others: (a) group dynamics and (b) being more connected to campus.

Group dynamics. Group dynamics was an important mentioned by all 12 participants in their interviews. Participant 8 shared, “I think [my leadership department] definitely is the center of my college experience.” Participants discussed feeling a sense of belonging, having a sense of purpose, and feeling valued as key components to their relationships with others, which correlated with a positive sense of wellbeing and overall thriving in college. Residence halls and leadership organizations were two distinct factors that impacted group dynamics.

All 12 participants mentioned they enjoy being around people who share similar interests in their leadership roles. Participant 12 made the following observation:

I think I’m the most grateful for [my leadership organization] maybe even more so than my [residence hall], because I feel I’ve had more memories and experiences, failures and successes there . . . so I feel it’s just stretched me a lot more than anything else on campus, except maybe my major.

In addition, most of the participants revealed they would not have known the people in their leadership organizations if they were not in their current leadership roles.

Participant 2 explained, “I think that that’s an important part about getting involved and taking on different roles is you get to know so many people on campus that you wouldn’t have before.” All 12 participants shared how they met people in their leadership roles they would not have met otherwise.

Being more connected to campus. Eight of the 12 participants described being more connected to campus than they would have been if they had not been involved in their leadership roles. All eight participants stated their leadership roles allowed them to be involved in faculty and staff conversations, which helped them better understand

certain aspects of campus. Participant 3 mentioned, “I really love the way that this position connects me with the rest of campus . . . I think having those connections and [being] able to network in that way has been good.” The interviewed students appreciated the connections and opportunities their leadership positions provided.

Participant 6 excitedly expressed, “One way that has positively impacted my college experience is just the opportunities that I have to sit in on professional boards and conversations with experienced professionals in their field and observe how they interact with each other.” Students felt they could have a seat at the table and advocate for their fellow students, in addition to sharing with other students what was happening on campus. For example, Participant 7 shared, “[I liked] knowing things going on on campus and being able to inform students was fun . . . it feels good to be able to be [explain why it’s happening], there is a purpose for a reason . . .” Students appreciated the opportunities their positions afforded them in connecting to the campus at large.

Theme 5: Leadership Identity Development

All 12 participants discussed the importance of leadership identity development. Participant 4 used an analogy to describe what she learned about her leadership identity development:

I think I learned that leadership is like a sweater you put on and try to make it fit on you. What does it mean for me to be a leader? There is not an objective leader that you become. You make leadership fit on you and work for you. You’re always going to have the same strengths and weaknesses as a leader, as a follower, as a student, [and] as a human. . . . So being a leader you figure out a way of leading that works for you.

Two subthemes described this identity development: (a) self-discovery and (b) prescribed leadership identity. In addition, specific factors for each subtheme were mentioned throughout the interviews.

Self-discovery. All 12 students noted the importance of self-discovery on their leadership identity development. In particular, Participant 6 stated, “I’ve learned self-discovery types of things, [like] learning that I really enjoy being task-oriented and checking things off. I wouldn’t have necessarily said that about myself last year.” Four key qualities emerged from the interviews: (a) increased self-confidence, (b) greater ownership and autonomy, (c) increased self-authorship, and (d) improved self-efficacy.

An increase in self-confidence was a main factor of a student’s self-discovery. For example, Participant 4 stated that, to be an effective leader, she realized she needed to “take the steps to get there. Nobody can do that for me.” As a result, students gained confidence in their abilities and took more ownership of their work in their organizations, impacting their wellbeing. Moreover, students felt more ownership and autonomy when in their leadership role for an extended period of time. Participant 3 described, “[My second year] I felt like I knew what I was doing and was able to take more ownership of it.” Participants mentioned ownership and autonomy having an impact on their self-worth and overall sense of thriving in their leadership roles.

In all 12 interviews, students shared they learned more about their strengths and weakness. In particular, Participant 9 [became] “more confident in myself and the type of person I am. My strengths and weakness and just the fact that I’m a step closer to that self-actualization of me.” Participants also mentioned they could learn more about themselves through their experiences. Participant 9 shared his personal reflections: “I

heard the idea of being a follower before being a leader and this cliché servant leadership idea, but really beginning to internalize what that feels like and looks like in real life.”

As a result of an increased self-awareness, participants gained a greater sense of purpose and self-efficacy. Students realized their ability and potential to positively impact their campus community, and they found purpose in their leadership organizations. For example, Participant 11 stated, “I think [my leadership position] is where I find the most purpose. . . . It has definitely made me realize what I want to do with my life.” In their leadership roles, participants learned more about their strengths and weaknesses.

Prescribed leadership identity. Of the 12 participants interviewed, 6 participants mentioned the impact of expectations of others on their leadership identity development and their overall experience in their leadership roles. The participants expressed feeling they had to possess certain leadership characteristic or fit a specific style, which impacted how they perceived and performed their leadership roles. Participant 4 characterized this notion by saying, “There were a lot of expectations of me . . . what I was going to be like in social interactions . . . in work and realizing I was going to have to break some of that, [and] not be so constrained by it.” Two main factors emerged from the six interviews expressing the impact of a prescribed leadership identity: desire for perfection and feeling the need to fit a certain leadership style.

Six participants felt a desire for perfection and needed to please others when planning events for the campus community. For example, Participant 2 said, “I struggled with a lot of guilt in those times of wishing I could have done the best week ever and so just trying to struggle with the fact [and] accepting we did a good job.” Throughout these six interviews, participants mentioned the pressure to fit a certain mold or leadership style.

Students also described their experiences of feeling they had to live up to the expectations of others or replicate the performance of the students previously in their roles. In particular, Participant 3 shared,

I feel like there has been a certain identity described to me, that I'm expected to be put together, organized, and a well-rounded student, and I'm not that. I feel as though I have to hold up to this certain ascribed identity when being in the student center. I feel like having this [leadership role] I'm expected to be a certain way, and that's not who I am so living up to who that person has been really hard.

Similarly, participants mentioned feeling pressure to fit a certain leadership style. For example, Participant 4 stated, "I think I was kind of dumbed down to one story about me, so not that it wasn't true, but that it was only one story and we're all a lot of stories."

Students mentioned the difficulty in balancing three expectations: how to act in their leadership roles, how to show characteristics from previous student leaders, and how to develop his or her unique leadership style.

Theme 6: Difficult Transitions

Six participants mentioned difficult transitions. Difficult transitions can negatively impact students' wellbeing by increasing their stress within their leadership roles. Three of the six participants felt there was a lack of training for new student leaders. Students expected an established description of their leadership roles. Some participants mentioned not feeling prepared well to succeed by the previous student leaders in their roles. Participant 1 expressed she and her co-director "were not set up well to understand what they were supposed to be doing." In particular, Participant 6 shared some advice on how to improve the transitional process:

I think a lot clearer communication on what the role is and is not . . . and then I think holding their hand, guidance once they step in because it's a whole new world. Being in a new job you need a lot of orientation even through they don't begin the job until August.

Students wanted to see more of a transition in the spring semester when both leaders, past and present, are still on campus. Participants noted that having more orientation to their leadership roles would aid in creating a better transition process.

Additionally, three of the six participants reported having a difficult transition between graduate assistants who supervised them. Participant 3 learned each graduate assistant leads differently, and adjusting to a new leadership style can be hard at times. While she had a difficult transition, Participant 3 mentioned she learned to adapt to different leadership styles and, in return, took more ownership in and had more autonomy over her work in her leadership role. In addition, Participant 2 mentioned, "Connections between [the organizations in student development] could be strengthened." Participants expressed that, while connections often happened, there was always room to improve.

The Essence

The essence of this study was that students' involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations has a positive and formative impact on a student's overall college experience and wellbeing. Participants mentioned how their college experience would not be the same without their involvement in their leadership position. Participant 9 expressed the essence of this study when he stated, "My college experience has been an overwhelmingly positive one. I have experienced significant personal growth at this school . . . learning more about myself and my characteristics, strengths, [and]

weaknesses.” Participant 9 also mentioned how his college experience pushed him to be a better person spiritually, relationally, cognitively, and academically, positively impacting his overall sense of wellbeing.

Students explained throughout the interviews that their college experiences would not have been the same without their involvement in their leadership positions.

Participant 3 stated, “It has been a co-curricular thing that has provided me just as much as education as classes have. . . . I think also what I’m learning in class impacts the way that I approach [my leadership position].” The phenomenon was common among the 12 participants, and their perspectives and stories contributed to the general understanding of how involvement in a leadership position impacts the collegiate experience.

Chapter 5

Discussion

A review of the literature and the results of this study provide evidence supporting the conclusion that involvement in a leadership position in a club or organization has a positive, formative impact on students' overall college experience and wellbeing.

Review of the Findings

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory posited the "extent to which students can achieve particular developmental goals is a direct function of the time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains" (p. 522). The findings from this study indicated students' active involvement in leadership positions impacts their overall college experience and wellbeing. The participants mentioned how their participation in leadership roles played an integral role in their collegiate experience by providing them with opportunities to learn and grow that they would not have had otherwise. Kuh and colleagues (1991) stated a student's involvement in co-curricular programs prompts personal and professional growth. The results from this study supported the idea of a strong connection between a student's involvement in organizations and his or her overall satisfaction with the college experience.

All 12 participants mentioned the positive impact of their leadership participation on their college experience. Some participants considered their involvement in their leadership positions as the highlight of their college experiences. In particular, students

felt known, supported, and challenged in their roles, which impacted their sense of thriving in college. Schreiner (2013) expressed how thriving is a critical component of the collegiate experience: “[C]reating a sense of community on campus is the single best way to help all students thrive . . . [specifically], the four key elements of a sense of community include membership, ownership, relationship, and partnership” (pp. 46–47). The elements of a sense of community emerged in the major themes discussed in the results of this study.

In addition, the findings from this study correlated with Astin’s (1984) and Kuh’s (1991) research on student involvement and engagement in leadership opportunities. Active participation and engagement in co-curricular programs is a critical contributor to a positive collegiate experience. Smith and Chenoweth (2015) noted, “[S]tudent involvement in extracurricular student organization led to more positive self-perceptions of leadership traits than for students who were not involved in those organizations” (p. 7). Participants noted an increase in their perceived cognitive and attitudinal growth as a result of being involved in co-curricular programs (Gellin, 2003). Additionally, students thrive in college when they are part of a community and experience a sense of belonging or purpose (Schreiner, 2010b).

Research Limitations

Though the findings from Chapter 4 suggested numerous positive benefits and formative opportunities for students involved in leadership, this study has several limitations to note.

Number of participants. One limitation from the research was the total number of participants. Although 12 participants provided in-depth interview responses, having

more participants would increase the veracity of the results. In addition, while participants were selected via purposeful sampling, there was not an equal representation of the student organizations, as five participants were involved in community service, and the remaining seven were involved in student activities and student government.

Variance of participant leadership experiences. Another limitation was the variance of participant leadership experiences. While most of the participants were currently in their leadership roles, three participants were at least one year removed from their roles. In addition, participants had differing lengths of experience, which could change the impact of those experiences.

Gender. Gender was another limitation to the research, as only four male students participated in this study. While recognizing the gender imbalance of the student demographics at the institution researched, an in-depth analysis of the male perspective is valuable.

Personal bias. Personal bias was another limitation to the research. The researcher has previous experience at small, liberal arts institutions, has worked in another small liberal arts institution, and has seen students benefit from their leadership involvement. In addition, the researcher had a positive and formative experience participating in leadership roles at her alma mater.

Implications for Future Research

One suggestion for future research is to explore whether the institution type or the culture of the institution impacts a student's involvement on campus and his or her overall college experience. An institution's mission provides guiding principles and values that drive the university. As a result, the institutional mission, in part, determines

the role of a student affairs practitioner in that institution. Further understanding of this impact may lend great understanding of how to support students in leadership roles.

Another implication for future research is to conduct a comparison study evaluating high-level leadership positions to general leadership roles in specific involvement areas to determine the overall development of leadership skills acquired. Foubert and Grainger (2006) said the differentiation between the two leadership groups merits further exploration: “What are the developmental differences between a student who only attends a club’s monthly meeting and a student who holds a leadership position in that organization?” (p. 171).

Moving forward, more research should be conducted on the gender imbalance in leadership involvement on college campuses, specifically in male students. In particular, what encourages male students to become involved in leadership positions on campus? Student affairs professionals should be concerned with the lack of male involvement in clubs and organizations and look for effective ways by which to encourage male students to get involved in college (Dugan, 2006a).

A final suggestion for future research is to conduct a longitudinal study that explores what aspects of the student experience resonate with students from their freshman year to their senior year. In what organizations do students hold leadership roles, and how does the institution engage students on campus?

Implications for Practice

Student affairs administrators play an important role in the collegiate experience and can greatly impact a student’s success while in college. The findings from this study are also significant because of the relevance to student engagement and retention efforts

as they relate to all college students. As a result of the findings, higher education practitioners should implement the following in their work with students: (a) provide resources for students to get engaged on campus, (b) provide mentoring relationships for student leaders, and (c) enhance leadership development training curriculum.

Provide resources for students to get engaged on campus. The research findings benefit student affairs administrators in their efforts to provide resources for students to get engaged in clubs and organizations on campus. It is critical for student affairs professionals to provide resources for helping students get involved in the campus community. In particular, student affairs professionals must share involvement resources with first-year students or transfer students and with those students who do not find a community in their residence halls. Schreiner (2010b) stated students begin to find a sense of belonging once they feel known and part of a community, whether in their residence halls, majors, or through the various clubs and organizations in which they engage. Further, student affairs administrators must seek students who might not feel engaged or involved in a community in order to support all students.

Provide mentoring relationships for student leaders. Another implication for practice is to continue to foster mentorship relationships with student leaders. As presented in the findings of this study, mentoring relationships strongly impacted the way students viewed their leadership experiences and thrived in college. Mentoring relationships support, challenge, empower, and encourage students to develop in their leadership roles on campus. The participants in this study mentioned how mentorship relationships influenced their collegiate experiences and how much they enjoyed encouraging and challenging other students based on their own positive mentorship

relationships. Student affairs practitioners should cultivate learning environments within their leadership organizations with hospitality and generosity.

Enhance leadership development training curriculum. A final implication is the need to enhance the leadership development training curriculum at institutions to improve students' cognitive and teamwork skills. Institutions should create opportunities for students to enrich their leadership development. Leadership initiatives should be set in place in order to further develop students' leadership skills and abilities. In addition, leadership identity development should be further explored as it relates to leadership development curriculum and training. Further, student affairs administrators should seek out leadership development curriculum and training that equips student leaders to succeed and feel confident in their leadership roles on campus.

Conclusion

Overall, the essence of this study was that students' involvement in leadership positions in clubs and organizations has a positive, formative impact on students' overall college experience and wellbeing. "The theory of involvement emphasizes active participation of the student in the learning process" (Astin, 1984, p. 522). Students are active agents of their learning and growth. Student affairs professionals should equip students to become scholarly practitioners and encourage them to be involved on campus.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

When using humans as research subjects you must first obtain their informed consent. Use this checklist to effectively create an informed consent form.

1. Project Title

The impact of leadership involvement on college students' experience and wellbeing

2. Introduction of Researcher(s)

Tricia Saunders is a graduate student earning her Masters of Higher Education and Student Development at Taylor University. Her assistantship is in the Residence Life Department with the Women's Programming cabinet. She selects, trains, mentors, and supervises a cabinet of approximately 10 women from a variety of residence halls. She also helps schedule, plan for, and implements 2 to 4 events per semester that focus on the main struggles women face in their daily lives: eating disorders, perfectionism, authenticity, vulnerability, confidence, body image, etc.

3. Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study is to explore how leadership in clubs and organizations impact a student's overall college experience and wellbeing. The results from this research will assist higher education professionals in understand the benefits of campus programs and activities as greater attention should be given to examining the student experience in regards to a student's leadership development and wellbeing.

4. Explanation of Procedures

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be completing a face-to-face interview that will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You will be one of 12 participants in this study. After all interviews are complete, the researcher will transcribe the interviews and code for themes.

5. Risks and Benefits

Risks:

Because of the background of some students, there is a possibility that interview questions about their leadership position, college experience, transition to college, and wellbeing may prompt traumatic memories. For this reason, the researcher has contacted counseling services at your institution to make them aware of the study. If any part of this interview causes you distress, you are encouraged to utilize the counseling services at your institution.

Benefits:

This study will benefit you by giving you a platform to verbalize your experience in leadership position in campus clubs and organizations. This research will also assist higher education professionals in understanding the benefits of campus programs and activities as greater attention should be given to examining the student experience in regards to a student's leadership development and wellbeing. Furthermore, it will provide opportunities for future researchers to expand on my research and conduct a more in-depth study.

6. Safeguards of Data

I will not identify you during my thesis defense or in my research paper. Your name will be changed to protect your identity. Data will be published and your information will be shared with my authorities, but I will not use your real name in the final thesis/presentation. The data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

7. Freedom to withdraw from the study

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any point in the research process, the information gathered at that point will be destroyed.

8. Third Party Referral

Should you have any questions regarding this project at any time, please contact Tricia Saunders.

- *Email: tricia_saunders@taylor.edu*
- *Phone: (480) 216-9607*

My faculty sponsor's name is Tim Herrmann. Please contact him at tmherrmann@tayloru.edu.

9. If you have any questions regarding this research, your interview, your rights as a subject, or any other aspect of the search as it relates to your participation as a subject, it can be directed to Taylor University's Institutional Review Board at IRB@taylor.edu or the Chair of the IRB, Susan Gavin at 765-998-5188 or ssgavin@taylor.edu

SUBJECT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study.

Subject's Printed Name: _____

Subject's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Alias: _____ (completed by researcher)

1. Age: _____

2. Gender:

- Male
 Female

3. Year:

- Freshmen
 Sophomore
 Junior
 Senior
 Transfer
 Other _____

4. College Major(s): _____

5. Leadership Position

- TSO
 TWO

6. What is your leadership role in the organization?

7. How long have you been in this leadership role?

Introduction

- Tell me about your college experience.

College Life

- Describe your involvement on your college campus
 - How did you get involved in the club or organization?
 - If you've been in this role before, what has made you want to continue in the specific role?
- Describe your leadership role
 - Job description, time commitment, etc.
 - What is your favorite part of your leadership position and why?
 - What is your least favorite part of your leadership position and why?
 - What role has your leadership position played in your college experience?
- Tell me about your social life in college.
 - How do you spend your time?
 - What do you spend your time on?
- What have you learned from your experience in a leadership position?
 - What have you learned about yourself in the process?
 - What, if anything, did you learn that you can take with you after college?
- What has helped you succeed in college?
 - What has helped you succeed in your leadership role?
- Do you believe your past experiences have affected your involvement on campus? If so, how?
- How has your experience in your leadership impacted your college experience? If so, how?
- In your opinion, what has your college done well in helping you adjust to your leadership position?
 - What has the college done poorly?
 - How could they better equip you for success?

