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Impact of a Student Leadership Experience on the Development of Creativity in Undergraduate Students

Austin Taylor Smith
Taylor University

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IMPACT OF A STUDENT LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT
OF CREATIVITY IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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

Austin Smith

September 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

Austin Taylor Smith

entitled

Impact of a Student Leadership Experience on the Development of Creativity in
Undergraduate Students

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

Master of Arts degree
in Higher Education and Student Development

September 2017

Drew Moser, Ph.D. Date
Thesis Supervisor

Scott Gaier, Ph.D. Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

Tim Herrmann, Ph.D. Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

Tim Herrmann, Ph.D. Date
Director, M.A. in Higher Education and Student Development

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a leadership experience on the development of creativity in undergraduate students in order to help student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators better understand how they can develop creativity in their students. A phenomenological study was conducted on students who held a leadership position as a Resident Assistant or cabinet member of a student organization on the campus of a small institution in the Midwestern United States. The study consisted of an open-ended survey and semi-structured interviews. Key findings from this study include insight into various aspects of students' experiences in leadership, including event planning, supervisors, collaboration, impact on communication, looking at past failure, incorporation of interests into their roles, redefining creativity through their roles, and the students' creative self-efficacy. These findings additionally provide support for the idea that a leadership experience is an effective method for teaching creativity to undergraduate students.

Acknowledgements

Sun Tzu said, “To lift an autumn hair is no sign of great strength; to see the sun and moon is no sign of sharp sight; to hear the noise of thunder is no sign of a quick ear.” In reading these lines, I am reminded of how the completion of this thesis is not a sign of my ability but is the result others who have invested in me. Throughout the thesis process and life in general, the ability to be observant and a love for learning have been instilled upon me and carefully fostered, not by my own natural disposition, but by the support of others. As I reflect upon the past year of preparing, researching, and writing, I think of those who laid the foundational work allowing me to reach this point.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Society often views creativity as some abstract, ethereal mantle that graces certain individuals, thus bestowing upon them the ability to be artistically inclined (McNiff, 1998). Current research, however, suggests otherwise. Within the past thirty years, scholars across the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and higher education have become increasingly intrigued with the subject of creativity. The vast majority of research and writing on the topic has strived to examine what traits or dispositions are present in creative individuals, the factors contributing to creativity, and methodologies for its development.

Part of the reason for the recent emphasis on creativity is the understanding that innovation is a vital component in economic and societal prosperity, especially in a post-recession society. In *The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity*, Florida (2010) stated, “The real key to economic growth lies in harnessing the full creative talents of every one of us” (p. 182). In a similar line of thought, businesses and universities are realizing creative dispositions must be developed in students, particularly during their college years.

In *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Berrett (2013) proposed that “climate change, income inequality, and escalating health-care costs cannot be remedied by technocratic solutions alone” and that “knowledge will need to be combined across

disciplines, and juxtaposed in unorthodox ways” (para. 6). He further stated that development of creativity in the undergraduate years better prepares students who are more apt to switch between multiple careers and may eventually work in jobs and entire fields not yet in existence. In the end, individuals who have tools allowing them to be adaptable and make connections throughout various fields will set the course of future society.

Fortunately, the tools utilized by creative individuals are often developmental outcomes that student affairs professionals seek to foster in those involved in student leadership. Such traits include collaboration (Astin & Astin, 1996; Lucas, Claxton, & Spencer, 2014), engagement with multiple fields of study (Lucas et al., 2014; Patterson, 2012; Runco, 2007), and the ability to navigate complex and ambiguous situations (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Runco 2007). If students develop such traits through their leadership experience, they should ideally develop in creative capabilities. Despite these potential connections between student leadership and creativity, little to no research exists to provide evidence for their connection. Additionally, the terms *creativity* and *leadership* have a variety of definitions, making discussions concerning them challenging.

Working Definitions

Previously mentioned traits are common themes in much of the current literature; however, they are only components of the greater subject of creativity. Because of the variety in approaches to creativity, this study utilized the following working definition: creativity is the ability to make connections within a single field or across multiple fields of knowledge to create a novel concept or product. This working definition gives a

concise description while leaving room for the variety of traits used by many researchers to give clarity to the nature of creativity.

As with creativity, student leadership is also a broad topic within the realm of higher education with a myriad of views concerning the definition of leadership, its purpose, and how to develop it in the university. Due to the diversity of thought regarding leadership, this study used the following working definition: student leadership refers to any position in which a student is developed in order to cultivate characteristics indicative of effective leaders. Specifically, the characteristics to be developed in student leaders are those described by Cress and colleagues (2001). Additionally, although Astin and Astin (1996) argued leadership is a process rather than a position, for the purpose of this study, leadership is discussed as a role since the students examined are in designated leadership positions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine if a student leadership experience fosters traits associated with creative individuals and, if so, the extent and manner in which those traits are developed. This study sought to understand the experiences of students in a position of leadership on the campus of a small, private, faith-based university located in the mid-west. In understanding the experience of students in relation to their leadership experience and creative development, this study endeavored to gain insight into potential methods for creative development that could be further tested and eventually implemented. As the accounts were collected and analyzed, the following research questions served to guide the study:

1. *Is creativity a developmental outcome of a student leadership experience?*
2. *What traits indicative of creative individuals are being developed in student leaders and how are these traits being developed?*

In addressing these questions, student development professionals may better understand how creativity can be cultivated in their student body. Additionally, those who supervise student leaders may be able to adapt aspects of their practices in order to further develop creative dispositions in their students. In conclusion, understanding if and how creative development occurs through a student leadership experience may allow universities to increase their impact on the global community as they produce innovative individuals who are confident and ready to take on society's largest problems.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Creativity

The nature of creativity. The subject of creativity is difficult to define concretely. According to Kandiko (2012), “Creativity research is so broad and contested in part because it is conceptualised from several disciplinary angles” (p. 192). Another challenge to approaching creativity is that the general public holds a false idea that creativity specifically refers to artistic ingenuity and resourcefulness. Countering this notion, McNiff (1998) claimed, “There is also the assumption that creative expression is only for the talented few and that [the general public’s] creation is a waste of time since it will never compare to what the 'masters' do" (p. 22). Rather than referring specifically to an artistic skillset, creativity is a way of thinking, which can be applied to any field.

In his book *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) described creativity as “any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one” (p. 28). He further defined a creative person as “someone who's thoughts or actions change a domain or establish a new domain” (p. 28). Another aspect of Csikszentmihalyi’s work in creativity has been to describe it in relation to the term *flow*. This concept of flow is a state of consciousness in which one is stretched and involved in some form of novelty in a way that is “almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused” (p. 110). In his studies,

Csikszentmihalyi noted individuals who exhibit high amounts of creativity within their given area often find themselves in flow when under pressure but in the midst of innovation.

Alternatively, Runco (2003) defined creativity as “any thinking or problem solving that involves the construction of new meaning” (p. 318). He elaborated that, while most who study creativity include the usefulness of the innovation as an aspect of the definition, the constructed idea will most likely be useful to at least the individual who came up with it. In addition to his working definition, he argued,

A critical assumption is that everyone has creative potential. Creativity is not only characteristic of eminent geniuses nor even only of productive professionals. This follows from the notion that creative potential is a part of the basic human tendency to construct (personal) interpretations and assimilate information as we experience it. (p. 321)

With such ideas, Runco (2007) expounded upon commonalities in creative individuals. His list of traits, tendencies, and characteristics of creative people included autonomy, flexibility, preference for complexity, openness to experience, sensitivity, playfulness, tolerance of ambiguity, risk taking or risk tolerance, intrinsic motivation, psychological androgyny, self-efficacy, and wide interests and curiosity.

Similarly to Runco (2003), much of the current research on creativity also looked at dispositions found in creative individuals. In a study on primary and secondary school children in the UK, Lucas (2016) utilized a five-dimensional model for looking at creativity, which he developed in a study along with Claxton and Spencer (2014). Three sub-characteristics elaborate the definition of each disposition. The first is that

individuals are inquisitive, that is, they wonder and question, explore and investigate, and challenge assumptions. The second disposition is that creative people are imaginative; they play with possibilities, make connections, and use intuition. Third, creative students are persistent, meaning they stick with difficulty, dare to be different, and tolerate uncertainty. The fourth trait is that they are collaborative by sharing the product of their creativity, giving and receiving feedback, and cooperating appropriately. Finally, creative individuals are disciplined through developing techniques, reflecting critically, and crafting and improving (Lucas et al., 2014). Although the studies were performed on primary school children, the dispositions described still apply when transferred to a university setting.

In 2002, Treffinger, Young, Selby, and Shepardson described a list of “Personal Creativity Characteristics” as a basis for their article, “Assessing Creativity: A Guide to Educators.” These behaviors included generating ideas, digging deeper into ideas, openness and courage to explore ideas, and listening to one’s “inner voice” (p. ix). The characteristics were used in conjunction with operations, context, and outcomes: operations refer the strategies to analyze situations, context is the physical space and culture that allow an environment for creativity, and outcomes are the products created. The components mentioned above are in dynamic relationship with each other and allow for productivity.

Hulme, Thomas, and DeLaRosby (2014) also looked at a series of traits common amongst creative individuals when looking at college students. They described these traits as *malleable characteristics of creative individuals*, including curiosity, associative thinking, courage, and creative self-efficacy. Here, curiosity is the motivation to enter

ambiguity to find novel experiences. Associative thinking is defined as combining ideas in new ways. Courage in creative individuals refers to overcoming fears and remaining true to beliefs in adversity. The final characteristic is creative self-efficacy—the mindset that one can be creative. Such a mindset is highly important in combating the misconception that creativity is a trait of an elect few.

Hulme et al. (2014) also noted creativity as a process to be undertaken and proposed a framework for creative ideation. The process involves identifying a problem, self-immersing in the subject; generating, combining, incubation, evaluating, and selecting ideas; and, finally, prototyping and implementing the idea. The emphasis in this method is on the final step in which ideas are prototyped, refined, and implemented in order to put the creative output to use.

Other studies have looked more at how students themselves view creativity. A study on Chinese college students by Zhu and Zhang (2011) examined students' perception as to which aspects contribute most to their own notion of creativity. They found that motivation was the most common factor attributed to creativity. This aspect was followed by intelligence, personality, knowledge, and environment, respectively. A student's self-perception of his or her own creativity has also been studied in relation to leadership potential. Lester (2011) sought to examine this relationship; however, the results of the study showed no statistical significance between the two traits. Still, in her discussion, she postulated the results might have been due to the limited sample and the nature of the subject-selection.

Despite the diverse approaches to discussing creativity as a subject, the following common themes can be drawn from the current literature: creative individuals are

curious, embrace the uncertain, and contribute some sort of novel product or way of thinking (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Hulme et al., 2014; Lucas et al., 2014; Runco, 2007; Treffinger et al., 2002). By analyzing the common traits of creative individuals and the most widely accepted definitions of creativity, researchers have studied how student development professionals can cultivate those traits in students.

Development of creativity and implementation in universities. After examining the nature of creativity comes the challenge of developing it in university students. Fortunately for colleges, “The fact that Creativity is largely intentional supports the notion that ‘we can do something about creativity.’ It is not fixed at birth, nor necessarily lost in midlife or late adulthood” (Runco, 2007, p. 411). This concept that creativity is about developing traits or methods is particularly good news in light of the TED talk by Robinson (2006), in which he argued that the modern school system is "educating people out of their creative capacities." Thus, in the current state of American education, colleges and universities must be the ones to re-instill creative dispositions in their students.

An important note to make is that the development of creativity can be impacted by culture. A study by Kharkhurin and Motalleebi (2008) compared the creativity of monolingual college students from the United States, Russia, and Iran. They found the indicators of creativity were weaker in the Iranian students. After follow up interviews, the researchers concluded that the result was most likely due to the authoritarian nature of Iranian culture and emphasis on convergent thinking.

Alternatively, Hargrove and Rice (2015) proposed that creativity is related to practices such as metacognition and is a teachable skillset. They stressed metacognition

in developing creativity and divergent thinking: "Metacognition is a logical conduit for developing creative problem-solving approaches in the classroom" (p. 162). They argued metacognition could improve the creative capabilities of design students when shown the correlation between the awareness of cognition and creativity.

Another approach to developing creativity considers the environmental factors that contribute to creative development. Looking at the classroom, Cole, Sugioka, and Yamagata-Lynch (1999) identified a series of factors that produce an environment that fosters creativity. After studying a university-level design course, they found personal teacher-student relationships, assessment methods, openness and freedom of choice in finding individual creative styles, and classroom activities were some of the elements that created such an environment. Wyke (2013) also found pedagogy emphasizing experimentation and reflection was an effective method for universities to develop creativity. By encouraging students to partake in such practices, innovation can be developed more effectively.

Similarly, Hulme et al. (2014) proposed the importance of creativity ecosystems as the method for developing creative characteristics and supporting creative methodology. They proposed generating such environments through reengineering campus organizational structures and organizing learning experiences to develop creative characteristics. Reengineering campus organizational structures occurs when institutions allow physical space and time for students to engage with creativity and by hiring personnel with adventurous dispositions who are comfortable with uncertainty and willing to take risks. Learning experiences can be created as well, allowing students to

prototype ideas while having room for failure, emphasizing deep questioning, and allowing students to learn from a group of creative mentors.

Such environments conducive to creative development are another common theme in literature specific to the development of creativity in higher education. The literature often identifies supervisors and educators as critical components to providing a space in which students can develop in their creative potential (Alencar, Fleith, & Pereira, 2017; Baillie, 2006; Jackson & Sinclair, 2006). According to Jackson and Sinclair (2006), an appropriate pedagogy for creativity is built upon the relationships between teachers and students. In order to encourage creative development, teachers should show how they are creative and design an environment that engages students, allowing them to combine abilities and information to produce creative outcomes. Although most literature considers creative development specifically in the academic realm, the proposed techniques provide a basic framework upon which educators can begin to consider how to develop creativity in students.

Many colleges and universities have already started the task of developing creativity in their students. In his article, Berrett (2013) identified schools integrating creativity into their practices. Amongst those listed were Stanford, Carnegie Mellon, Adrian College (MI), University of Kansas, City University of New York, University of Kentucky, and Oklahoma State University. The methods utilized thus far range from requiring specific classes in creativity, to developing offices in the university structure with the purpose of integrating innovation into academic work, to training staff and faculty to foster creativity in students. Design thinking has also been a focus in some schools so students learn how “to use metaphor and analogy to reframe problems, break

them down to component parts to view them from different perspectives, and work iteratively—that is, revising again and again—to find answers” (para. 15). Such universities have found great success in producing innovative students who can think critically in their fields.

With the successes in developing innovative students comes the challenge of how to go about assessing creative development. According to Cowen (2006), "The multiplicity and often the suddenness of the possible approaches to being creative therefore complicate the business of assessing the process—because the creative process, for any learner, is unpredictable and difficult to capture" (p. 157). Additionally, society looks to products as the measure of creativity, rather than the process of the creative act. Thus, Cowen proposed a method of self-assessment in which students put together a portfolio with their definition of creativity and a standard of how they think their own creativity should be judged; sources for this definition; items they gathered through the program; a description of how their creativity was manifested during the activity based in the items mentioned above and comparing the description to their standard; and an explanation of how they reached their conclusion. The portfolio is presented to a panel of judges who audit the objectivity of the self-assessment and ensure it truly matches their preset standards. Balchin (2006) also proposed utilizing a panel of judges knowledgeable to the relevant field to assess creativity in a given work, emphasizing consensual assessment. Consensual assessment can be integrated into an assessment method such as that proposed by Cowen (2006) or utilize a more quantitative tool to determine creative development while reducing the potential for skewed results due to a biased judge.

In the face of contemporary societal challenges, businesses and universities are beginning to realize the importance of developing creativity in their students (Florida, 2010; Wyke, 2013). The current research and discussion on the subject indicates creativity is not an innate gifting but a skill or trait that can be developed (Runco, 2003, 2007). Furthermore, the foremost researchers in the topic have suggested that creativity is a natural disposition in children; however, the education system, which promotes convergent thinking, forces children to lose this instinctive trait (Robinson, 2006). Thus, it becomes the role of the university to re-teach creativity to their students in order to provide an innovative workforce.

Leadership Development in College Students

In an age with great social and economic problems, many universities also put an increased effort on developing leaders. Thus, cultivating leadership qualities is a popular topic for student development scholars. Due to such studies, researchers have proposed a variety of models and theories of leadership development in undergraduate students.

A fundamental theory in understanding how leadership and other qualities are developed in students is Astin's Involvement Theory (1984). Astin suggested students who are involved have greater developmental and learning outcomes. He also stated behavior is more critical to involvement than simply valuing it. Involvement, according to Astin, has five postulates: it is physical or psychological; it occurs along a continuum; it has both qualitative and quantitative attributes; it is proportionally related to learning and development; and an educational policy's effectiveness is related to its ability to increase student involvement. Since almost every academic or nonacademic policy or

practice impacts involvement in some way, student leaders should be developing or learning more due to their engagement on campus.

Astin's Involvement Theory (1984) serves as the basis of numerous studies concerning student leadership. In 2012, Patterson studied undergraduate students from the University of Florida's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The study examined the extent to which involvement in an organization impacts the development of leadership behaviors. The findings showed involvement in organizations and clubs was an influential factor in developing leadership. Patterson added, "The leadership organizations can be associated with a student's major, but some of the most effective leadership development opportunities seem to be with interdisciplinary organizations" (p. 7). Although this study was conducted on a single school within a large university, Patterson's finding concerning interdisciplinary organizations indicates that similar results may occur elsewhere.

In addition to how involvement impacts leadership development, some also assessed the impact of leadership training programs. In their study, Cress and colleagues (2001) examined students across ten universities. Specifically, they looked at "whether leadership education and training [had] a direct effect on college student' leadership ability as well as on their personal and educational development" (p. 15). Cress et al. surveyed students regarding twelve categories: understanding of self; ability to set goals; interest in developing leadership in others; commitment to civic responsibility; sense of personal ethics; clarity of personal values; conflict resolution skills; decision-making abilities; ability to deal with complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity; ability to plan and implement programs and activities; willingness to take risks; and understanding of

leadership theories. In addition to these twelve leadership categories, the researchers also asked if students held an elected position and measured their co-curricular involvement. The researchers found those who participated in leadership activities experienced greater change in the developmental outcomes than non-participants, with no difference in regard to gender. The study also found that experiences in leadership education and training contributed significantly to such development as opposed to student leaders' self-selection. Additionally, Cress et al. identified common elements of programs that directly impacted development: "(a) opportunities for service (such as volunteering); (b) experiential activities (such as internships); and (c) active learning through collaboration (such as group projects in the classroom)" (p. 23).

Besides students' involvement in programs, studies have also looked at leadership in the form of models. In 1996, Astin and Astin, through the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), published their social change model of leadership development. They argued leadership was primarily concerned with societal change and that leadership is a process, collaborative, and is value-based. Additionally, Astin and Astin added that all students are potential leaders and that service is an effective way to develop their leadership skills. The social change model's stated goals were (a) to increase students' self-knowledge of skills as they relate to leadership capacity and leadership competence of organizing individuals to work as a group and (b) to bring about positive social change (p. 19). Essential to the model were seven values, referred to as the "seven C's" along with a central hub. The values were categorized at the level of the individual, group, or community. At the individual level were consciousness of self, congruence of behavior, and commitment. Group values were collaboration, common purpose, and the ability to

engage in controversy with civility. Finally, community and societal values included citizenship and change, which was the central hub of the model (p. 21). Since its publication, the social change model has been a focus of numerous studies.

Utilizing the social change model (Astin & Astin, 1996), Dugan (2006) examined variance in male and female college students. The study examined if a difference existed between genders across each of the eight variables proposed in the model. Dugan found students struggled most with the ability to engage in controversy with civility, citizenship, and change, regardless of sex. This study ultimately supports the social change model as a generally applicable method of understanding student leadership.

Examining leadership practice has been another popular method of assessing student leadership. Utilizing an updated version of Student Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), Posner (2004) examined fraternity presidents and cabinet members and their self-identification of leadership capacities. The LPI examined practices described as “Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Challenging the Process, Enabling Others to Act, and Encouraging the Heart” (p. 444). Students who used the practices put forth in the LPI self-identified as more effective in their leadership capabilities. These findings indicate leadership can effectively be examined in students by considering practices.

Ultimately, college student leadership is a topic that has been greatly studied by scholars in the realms of higher education and student development. Leadership is not an instinctive ability found in college students, but rather, it is a set of learned skills and traits (Astin & Astin, 1996). The development of these traits or practices—such as those specified by Cress et al. (2001), Astin and Astin (1996), and Posner (2004)—is closely connected to the students’ involvement on campus (Astin, 1984; Patterson, 2012).

Through a student's engagement on campus, they can further develop into individuals prepared to be effective leaders upon graduation.

Intersections between Creativity and Student Leadership

Many points of similarity exist between creativity and leadership in the university. Such intersections are seen primarily in traits found in creative individuals and characteristics student affairs practitioners hope to foster in student leaders. By examining these points of commonality, one can postulate how creativity may be developed through a student leadership experience.

The first similarity between creative individuals and student leaders lies in the practice of collaboration. Astin and Astin (1996) described collaboration as one of seven values (the seven C's) of their social change model of student leadership. Similarly, Lucas and colleagues (2014) included a collaborative disposition as one of the five dimensions in their model of creativity. Ideally, as students work in a group with peers in a leadership capacity, they can refine ideas by giving and receiving constructive feedback.

A second aspect of convergence between student leaders and students who are innovative is in engagement within a broad range of fields. Patterson (2012) observed that students were more developed in their leadership capacities when involved in interdisciplinary organizations. In line with engagement with the interdisciplinary, Lucas et al. (2014) described the ability to make connections as an aspect of an imaginative disposition. Additionally, Runco (2007) included the presence of a wide range of interests as an indicative characteristic of a creative individual. When students engage in

leadership within a diverse organization, they should be able to more effectively make connections between various subjects and develop interests outside their major field.

The third aspect of commonality in leadership and creativity is in the ability for students to enter into uncertain or complex situations. Cress et al. (2001) used the ability to deal with complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity and willingness to take risks as categories for measuring students' leadership ability. Runco (2007) also included each of these factors in his list of traits of creative people. Students involved in a leadership position should be developing these capabilities in a manner that allows them to experiment and create new ideas, despite the risk of failure.

In conclusion, a myriad of characteristics and practices overlap between leadership development in students and creative individuals. Additionally, if students are given the opportunity to be creative, according to Astin (1984), they should be developing and learning more due to their involvement in creative practice. Unfortunately, little to no research exists concerning if students involved in leadership actually develop creative capabilities. Thus, this study sought to affirm connections between creativity and its development in student leaders through their involvement in a leadership position.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Many similarities exist between traits found in creative individuals and in characteristics universities seek to develop in their student leaders. Thus, it follows that, as universities develop such traits in student leaders, they should, to some capacity, be developing creative capabilities. This study examined students in leadership positions to see if they were being developed into creative individuals.

Approach

Since little research has been conducted on this topic thus far, a qualitative study was most appropriate to explore this subject. According to Creswell (2013), “A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). Since this study examined students’ experiences and how creativity develops through such occurrences, a phenomenological study was most appropriate methodological design type. Additionally, this study utilized the hermeneutical approach to phenomenology, as described by van Manen (1990), allowing the researcher to make connections and interpretations from the collected data. Since this study was highly exploratory, bracketing out the researcher’s thoughts and experiences with the phenomenon would have inhibited drawing comprehensive conclusions.

Context

The university where the study took place is a private, faith-based, liberal-arts university located in the mid-west. The student body consists of around 2,000 students, primarily undergraduates. The university has many long-standing programs and traditions, placing a large emphasis on their residence life and student programs.

The participants for this study were students who held leadership positions on campus. Specifically, these students were involved with residence life as Resident Assistants (RAs) or who were members of cabinets under student organizations. These two groups of student leaders were purposefully selected, as they were the most likely to develop the traits of interest due to the intense time and energy commitments inherent in their roles. Additionally, one of the developmental outcomes for the university's student programming office is for students to develop in their creative capabilities. According to the Director of Student Programs, the office defines creativity as bringing either something physical or some sort of meaning to life. This definition of creativity is also discussed in relation to imagination, defined as "the seeing of something that is new or not yet and actively choosing to be that new or to bring it to life" (Director of Student Programs, personal communication, January 20, 2017). The Residence Life office at the institution also provides guidance on creativity in their class for incoming RAs. According to the Resident Director responsible for teaching this session, they discuss creativity as freedom within limitations in how RAs program in a way that incorporates unique ideas and interests within their floor or wings culture and traditions (personal communication, August 5, 2017). Because creativity is taught to some extent in both

offices, this study used purposeful sampling to ensure the selected individuals provided high-quality information about their experiences in leadership positions.

Instruments

This study utilized an open-ended electronic survey (Appendix A) developed by the researcher and was sent out to students identified as RAs or a member of a student organizations cabinet by either the Director of Student Programs or the Director of Residence Life. The survey inquired how or to what extent traits associated with creativity were developed through their leadership experiences (i.e., collaboration, broad interests, affinity toward complexity, broad interests, and risk tolerance). The wording of the survey questions was also analyzed to ensure the terminology in the protocol was clear and that alternate meanings of terms might be eliminated. To ensure this, the protocol was administered in a pilot study. The responses were examined to reduce confusion and ensure the protocol content was clear.

The researcher also developed an interview protocol (Appendix B) administered to eight students, determined through the surveys. This interview protocol sought a more comprehensive account of specific traits the student indicated were being developed through their leadership experience. Additionally, through the interviews, the students were asked about how they define creativity and if their leadership experience had had any impact on their thinking concerning creativity as a whole, as opposed to only examining creativity as a set of characteristics.

Procedures

After receiving approval from the IRB, the researcher consulted the Director of Student Programs and the Director of Residence Life to obtain a list of students involved

in leadership positions under their departments. Additionally, the directors were asked to encourage their students to complete the surveys. Next, an online survey was sent out to the students indicated by the directors. In order to increase the response rate, the researcher offered a drawing for \$10 gift card to the campus coffee shop as incentive. Third, the surveys were examined, and eight students who included responses indicating a unique perspective on one or more of the traits and indicated a willingness to meet for an interview were contacted. Selected students were then interviewed individually. The protocol for these interviews sought to gain a more detailed account of their experiences and determine if they had developed as creative individuals through their leadership experience. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed so the data could be analyzed.

Analysis and Validity

After collecting the data from the surveys and interviews, the researcher organized it into a readable document format. Next, the researcher read through the data and made notes and memos as suggested by Creswell (2013). Following the annotation, the data was coded according to common key words and phrases. Although the protocol lent to more preconfigured categories, the researcher was observant to allow other codes to emerge from the data. After the coding process, the codes were grouped into themes, and from themes interpretation began.

To ensure the validity of the data and its interpretation, the researcher utilized triangulation and member checking. Triangulation refers to connecting the data collected from multiple participants in order to achieve a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This strategy prevents one individual account from providing the sole basis of a reported finding, skewing the results. The researcher also

used member checking as a method of validating the data. This technique involved providing participants with a brief analysis of the data derived from their interview and asking the participants to confirm the accuracy of the analysis. Asking the participants to look over the preliminary analysis gave them the opportunity to provide alternative terminology or make corrections to misunderstood responses. Utilizing these strategies, the researcher could better ensure the validity of the findings.

Summary

The methodology for this study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological design in order to capture the experiences of student leaders to examine whether they were developing traits associated with creativity as a result of their leadership experience. By conducting both a survey and interviews, the data showed broader trends within potential creative development in student leaders and gave more detailed accounts of specific experiences providing explanations for such trends. This study sought to determine if students' experiences in a position of leadership were developing characteristics and skills such as an affinity toward complexity, the ability to make connections across various fields, diverse interests, and the ability to prototype and refine ideas. These traits indicated whether a leadership position was, in fact, equipping students to enter society as innovative individuals who will work to combat society's most challenging problems.

Chapter 4

Results

The results of this study sought to examine if a student's experience in a leadership position impacted their views of creativity, their perceptions of themselves as creative individuals, and their development of characteristics indicative of creative individuals. A survey, which the researcher used to identify interview participants, provided a general overview as to whether participants were developing traits that are desired outcomes of a leadership experience and attributes of creative individuals. The interviews expounded on the survey responses and asked further about each participant's definition of creativity and whether they viewed themselves as creative individuals.

Overview of Survey Results

The survey was sent to 169 students including the pilot survey; 32 students participated. Of the 32 respondents, 26 identified as female and 6 as male; 29 identified as white, and 3 identified as "multiple ethnicity/other." In terms of academic year, the participants included 9 sophomores, 11 juniors, and 12 seniors. Overall, most participants' responses were affirmative. The largest number of negative responses were in response to the questions inquiring if their leadership role allowed them to develop a broader range of interests and if their role allowed them to test and refine their ideas, with four negative responses per question (for full breakdown of responses, see Appendix C).

When asked whether their experience helped them to better make connections across multiple fields, participants on average interpreted the question as referring to networking connections rather than connections in information. Thus, responses that demonstrated an obvious misunderstanding of the question were discarded. To rectify this, the researcher asked the interviewees a similar question with clarified wording.

Overview of Interview Results

Of the eight survey participants, five were female, and three were male; five were white, and three identified as “multiple ethnicity/other.” Additionally, four participants (two males and two females) were Resident Assistants (RAs) while the other four (three females and one male) held positions in a student organization. Seven interview participants were currently in their roles, and one held his position the year prior. In addition, one of the RAs had been a member of a student organization previously, and one of the student organization members had been an RA the year before.

From the interview data, eight themes emerged, along with nine sub-themes. Participants discussed aspects of their leadership experience such as incorporation of interests into the role, event planning, impact on communication, supervisors, collaboration, and looking past failure. Incorporation of interests into the role included sub-themes of connection to one’s major, incorporation of class material into the role, and new interests developed from the role. Collaboration included a sub-theme of going to a team for input or support, and impact on communication included a sub-theme of creativity in conversation. Participants also specifically discussed creativity with themes of redefining creativity through their roles and creative self-efficacy. Redefining creativity through their roles included sub-themes of creativity as being art or music,

creativity as being new or original, and creativity as being unique. Creative self-efficacy included the sub-theme of the participant's role impacting his or her view of self as creative.

Incorporation of Interests into Role

In the interviews, all eight participants discussed incorporating their interests into their leadership positions. As a way to combat stagnation within her cabinet, one student organization president mentioned,

I think a lot of times finding things that I'm really interested in like talks that sound interesting or movies and, like, watching them together or going to something can, like, spark a conversation that I really want our cabinet to have.

Another student organization member referred back to her previous RA experience:

. . . we had to do an educational, um—different little educational things as [RAs]. We were required to do a certain number of them a year and one of them that I did, which was kind of impromptu, we—I kind of just taught the girls knitting. Which seemed really simple, but I've knit for fourteen years, so it was something that I felt that I could share with them, and it's something that I've always been interested in.

Although both of the above examples were more general, most examples given by participants included a connection to their major, incorporation of class material into their roles, or new interests due to their roles.

Sub-themes: Connection to major and incorporation of class material into role. Throughout the interviews, seven participants made a connection to their major, six of whom discussed their major in relation to their leadership position. Additionally, four

mentioned incorporating class information into their roles. One RA described how both her major and specific course information impacted her experience as a leader:

I love love love my major. I love communications. I love it because when I switched into it junior year, it was crazy to me that I was learning about things that I would apply to my daily life. Like, I was learning how to talk to people on my wing that I was—I was having super hard conversations, um, on my wing and I didn't know how to approach them, or I, like, didn't understand why they wouldn't—why they reacted in this way or what they wouldn't open up about this. And I would go to class and literally be, like, “And here's Johari's window, and here's closed information, and here's open information,” and I was, like, “Oh my gosh, this is, like, what I've—this is why I can't communicate with these people,” or “This is why this person is upset about this because I responded in this way.” . . . that's how I take that I've cried in class before because I've learned information that I could apply directly to somebody in my—that I was trying to lead. That was, like, the key to unlocking our problems so—or our solutions, I don't know, anyway, bad metaphor, whatever. Um, so yeah, I take that in, like—yeah, I've learned this from my major and I've applied it again to my role.

Sub-theme: New interests due to role. In addition to existing interests, six interviewees also spoke about how their roles fostered new interests. One RA, while discussing her new interests in other cultures, stated,

I've lived with people who I would never lived with if I hadn't come to college slash if I hadn't been in a leadership position that kind of required me to get to know people, um, on my wing . . . I'm living with people from Korea, people, um,

from the Bahamas, and just interests in their culture . . . interests in . . . how they celebrate, how they mourn, yeah, I think just interest in how they do life.

Another student, who was a professional writing major, discussed how her new interests impacted the direction she wanted to take her career:

. . . in the in the opportunities I've gotten, whether that was, like, going on the Civil Rights tour, or, um, or now in [student programs]—like, having my job where I, like, put on programming that furthers, like, understanding and education on certain issues, I found that, like, this is something that and I feel really called to, um, and that I have, like, a really valid and important perspective that a lot of people with my perspective—like, I'm not the only one with this perspective, but that a lot of the people in my—from my perspective don't end up going into this as, like, a career. And so there's kind of a empty hole a lot of times and so, um, and so—and so I was like, “I feel really called to that and I really love education and I really love—I really love higher education but I love, like, the academic end of it.” And so, um, getting to, like, put on programs that were kind of academic in nature, being a resource to people in my position, to my cabinet, but also to the student body. Um, I think all of those things I really really enjoyed and so I was like, “I wanna, like, teach. And I love sociology. I should teach.”

Through their experiences, the participants indicated they could find ways to incorporate interests into their roles as well as discover new passions as a result of their leadership.

Event Planning

The second major theme that emerged was event planning. All eight participants discussed their role in planning or executing events. One male RA stated,

I got to put together an escape room. That was a lot of fun and it was kind of ambiguous because I didn't know how to throw one together and—but I felt like the—taking risks is an idea that has been grown, uh, and fostered in the student development program, um, and this idea if you have a creative idea that you're not sure if it might go over well, like, take that risk, see how it develops. And, I mean, the event went over well, but it was more the process and, like, the anticipation of building something that I think was a cool experience.

Participants discussed how their planning of events also fostered new interests, allowed for collaboration, or helped them to see themselves as creative individuals.

Impact on Communication

Seven of the eight participants mentioned that their experiences impacted how they communicated in some manner. One participant spoke about learning from the successes and failure of his predecessors:

. . . some things were implemented really well, um, like, for instance, like, planning—like, floor emails, like, I didn't know at the time how vital that—that was—how effective that was. But, you know, I just carried on that kind of tradition and it was effective, so I learned from that.

Along a similar line of thought, another participant shared,

I spend a lot of time, like, figuring out the design of emails, figuring out the design of posters to figure out which—what communicates best to the students that I'm trying to reach. I want to make sure they don't have any questions, that it's, like, readable, that they want to read it all the way through.

Sub-theme: Creativity in conversation. In discussion on communication, half of the participants discussed being creative in conversations. One RA, while giving her definition of creativity, reflected,

I've definitely learned in this role, like, how do you creatively start a conversation with someone that you've only known—with a freshman that you've only known for five hours of, like, "The only thing that I can see that we have in common is you have jeans on, and I do too." And, like, how do you start a conversation with this person, uh, like, off of jeans? Um, let's see. . . . yeah, so being able to like—be engaging. I—I think there's a part of creativity, like, how do you keep someone engaged in what you're doing or talking about or trying. Like, my end product in that situation would be "I wanna have a relationship with you," so how do—like, how do I engage in a relationship with you. Um, and it would have to be creatively because this person just got dropped off and they're now without their parents for the first time in their life and they're just crying and, like, how do you move forward from there?

Of the four who discussed creativity in conversation, three participants described it from the perspective of an RA while one recounted the topic from her experience in student programs in terms of large-scale conversations on campus.

Supervisors

Six participants also mentioned their supervisor at some point in the interview. Participants spoke about their supervisors' influence on their thinking or how their supervisors allowed for a significant experience. One participant stated,

. . . entrepreneurship and innovation are huge interests of mine and [student programs] does a great job of . . . pushing [my cabinet] to innovate–[the director of student programs] does a good job of pushing–and that what–like, growth mindset’s taught with the–in the–in the paradigm or in the framework of risk taking and being willing to take risks. And so innovation–in order to innovate, you have to be able to take risks, like, that’s a–that’s a key requirement for innovation.

Others additionally described their supervisors’ roles in developing new interests and helping to teach them how to program effectively.

Collaboration

Another common theme in the interviews was an amount of collaboration in their roles, with six of the eight participants mentioning the idea. One student explained, I’ve got to interact with people and be collaborative with things, um, being identified as a student leader on campus has gotten me, um–and making those connections across campus has gotten me other opportunities–I’ve been utilized interviews before, so I feel like I have a better comprehension on the interview process and how to interview people.

Other participants mentioned collaborating with other organizations to put on events and how collaboration within their organization showed them the value of seeing and utilizing the strengths inherent in their group.

Sub-theme: Going to team for input or support. Among the discussion of collaboration in their leadership positions, four participants mentioned a team of people

with whom they could consult for input or support. One RA described his utilization of a team:

I'm computer science, [my co-RAs] definitely weren't, they were sports management. And so, like, kind of going on their terms of thinking, uh, like, when people say, "Hey I want to go out and play volleyball" or "I want to go do more, like, athletic kind of events," like, I can't relate on that. And so I had to, like, go to them and say, "Hey, uh, how would you do this? How would you think about implementing this kind of activity?" And then they'd kind of take it from there and that really helps kind of establish a relationship and connection and kind of giving some new insight.

Looking Past Failure

The sixth major theme that came forth in the interviews was looking past failure, either real or perceived. One participant who mentioned this theme discussed how he developed a growth mindset from his major and from his time in student programs:

. . . I'm a computer science major, I'm—the computer tells me I'm stupid, like, everyday. Like, I hit compile probably, like, every couple minutes and it tells me I'm stupid. And so also I would not necessarily say it's all from [student programs], a lot of it's from my major and just being comfortable in that—um, yeah, it—probably a lot more of it is from my major than from [student programs], but it is a core value for [student programs], and it's definitely supplemented, I'm not sure what the combination is, but both are really essential to me having a growth mindset and going, "yeah, I'm going to learn from this."

This participant further related how he views failure as an “iterative process,” a term derived from his major referring to a cycle of testing an idea or program, failing, and fixing it before trying again.

Redefining Creativity through Role

In their discussion of creativity, all participants mentioned some way in which their experiences in leadership impacted their views or definition of creativity. All had different ways of defining creativity but described how their definition, thoughts, or views on creativity changed through an experience or training within their leadership program. These descriptions of creativity often had similar components such as describing creativity as art or music (though not exclusively), creativity involving something new or original, and creativity as uniqueness.

Sub-theme: Creativity as art or music. Of the eight participants, seven mentioned creativity as including art and music. The one participant excluded from this number still mentioned art but discussed how it does not fit within his “paradigm” of creativity. Others mentioned art as being a more traditional idea of what defines creativity or how they at some point used art as a measurement of their own creativity (or lack thereof). One RA recounted,

. . . I think that before I was in leadership I would argue what I had said previously about creativity strictly referring to art only, um, or, like, the creation of art only but I have seen a skill that I have kind of, like, be able to flourish within my leadership position and I’ve been encouraged and told that, like, “this is a skill and, like, you have creative ways of going about this.”

Sub-theme: Creativity as new or original. In their descriptions of creativity, five participants described creativity as new or original in some way. One participant stated it as “making something original, fresh, or new, even just if to yourself, um, and it can be within a specific framework or making a new framework for things to be designed under.” Another defined creativity as “doing something new, um, maybe pushing yourself, um, in and area—something that you haven’t done before or that maybe somebody hasn’t laid out for you to do or you haven’t seen done perhaps.”

Sub-theme: Creativity as unique. Although similar to an idea of something being new or original, four participants discussed creativity as putting an individualized, unique spin on an idea. One stated, “It’s not even necessarily creating something, I think it’s engaging with concepts, with ideas, with physical materials in . . . not necessarily new but in very unique and personal-to-you ways.” Another gave the following definition of creativity:

. . . an individual’s, like, unique way of experiencing . . . which can happen in a lot of different outlets, whether it be in conversation and how they lead a conversation or how they listen in a conversation. Um, and then more, like, kind of art–arty outlets like painting or dancing or singing, um, but yeah I—overall I would say just a—a unique way of experiencing in however—whatever outlet they choose to experience then.

Creative Self-Efficacy

The final major theme participants discussed was creative self-efficacy or the idea that one is creative. All eight participants stated that they think of themselves as creative. One RA put it this way:

I like to do things differently. I like to break molds. I am a little bit of a challenger in that way, of if somebody tells me to do something or says I should do something, I'm gonna find the, like, freshest way to do that.

Another participant who held a leadership position in student programs described her creativity in relation to her skills:

I think a lot of times in the worldly sense of creativity, like as in someone who's artistic or musical, I wouldn't say I'm very creative. Um, but I do think I am creative in, um, I think [my organization] is a perfect-perfect example of how I get to practice creativity and, um, you know, I create-I create things in how I organize things or how I construct systems, um, whether that's, you know, organizing an event of people-that's how I really can expand and use my creativity, um, it's in how I organize events. Um, but in that-the creativity in the very traditional "sense of, like, art and music, um, yeah I-I'd say I have creativity in the sense of something a little bit more abstract than that.

Other participants also discussed their views of themselves as creative in relation to imagination, working within various frameworks, or being creative within their major.

Sub-theme: Role impacting view of self as creative. Seven participants affirmed that their experience impacted their creative self-efficacy. One participant recounted,

. . . so, like, creativity and arts and stuff is producing some sort of a good. Um, you-you produce something and so working on a event in a position of leadership I-I was able to see this product that I was producing, um, kind of come alive and take shape. Um, so in that sense, like, it was a more tangible value that I-I had

never really associated with, like, “Oh yeah, I’m creative because I’m a leader.”

Like, I never would have associated that, but then seeing how that has talked [sic] form in events . . . has really put some, um, value to what that means, ‘cause it is kind of a very abstract concept.

Others discussed how their views of themselves as creative individuals were impacted through their roles by allowing them to see ways they were creative. Additionally, some mentioned that their training specifically discussed creativity, thus broadening their perspectives on what creativity entails. Among the participants, one indicated that she did not feel like her experience in leadership contributed to her creative self-efficacy, as she had always viewed herself as a creative person.

Conclusion

The results of the survey and interviews provided a plethora of information about students’ experiences in leadership positions, as well as their thoughts about creativity and whether they viewed themselves as creative. Eight themes emerged from the interviews, including incorporating interests into their role, event planning, an impact on communication, supervisors, collaboration, looking past failure, redefining creativity through their roles, and creative self-efficacy. Nine sub-themes further elaborated on the themes, providing more layers of depth to understanding the nature of the participants’ experiences in their leadership positions.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The results of this study provide highly beneficial insight into the interactions between a student's experience in a leadership position and his or her development of creativity. These interactions were demonstrated in terms of the traits indicative of creative individuals, the way participants viewed creativity, and whether or not they defined themselves as creative individuals. Ultimately, the study indicated that leadership positions put students in spaces allowing them to develop creative skills and processes and to practice them. Additionally, experiences in leadership afforded students the opportunity to redefine creativity and see ways in which they themselves were creative. Together, these findings provide a more holistic picture of the participants' experiences in student leadership and the impact it had on their development of creativity.

Event Planning

Based on participant responses, event planning appears to be a common means for students to develop creativity through growing and practicing creative skills. Inherently, an activity such as event planning requires student leaders to gain comfort in working with ambiguity and complexity, traits mentioned in both leadership and creativity literature (Cress et al., 2001; Hulme et al., 2014; Lucas et al., 2014; Runco, 2007). These factors are present in much of event planning, whether through picking a mass-appealing theme or figuring out the logistics inherent in scheduling and executing an event.

Additionally, event planning provides students the opportunity to find avenues to incorporate their interests into their roles, producing creative programming. By integrating their interests into events, students learn to make interdisciplinary connections since they are combining the disciplines inherent within the program and their personal interests. Such integration can occur in a myriad of forms, whether through planning an educational event, teaching residents how to knit, or utilizing artistic and design skills to produce advertising for a campus-wide event. The idea of making connections between disciplines and interests aligns with Lucas et al.'s (2014) discussion of making connections as part of being imaginative. Similarly, Hulme et al. (2014) included associative thinking—combining ideas in new ways—as one of four characteristics of creative individuals. In summary, as student leaders find ways to incorporate their interests into programs, they practice and demonstrate creative attributes.

Another feature of event planning mentioned by participants was that they often collaborated with a team or cabinet to plan or execute programs. By working with others, student leaders were able to give and receive feedback to improve the quality of an event and come together afterward to reflect on the quality of the program and find ways to improve it the next time. This concept demonstrates collaboration as discussed by Lucas et al. (2014) as well as prototyping and reflection as described by Hulme et al. (2014) and Wyke (2013). Through events, participants gained beneficial practice in healthy collaboration and were given space to learn the process of prototyping and refining ideas.

Participants also mentioned event planning as a way in which they were able to see themselves as creative. This theme of self-efficacy points back to Runco (2007) and Hume et al. (2014) who included self-efficacy as a trait of creative individuals.

Ultimately, event planning provided an opportunity for students to gain experience with creativity and allowed student leaders to see the ways in which they were creative. This experience even caused some participants to develop a newfound creative self-efficacy as they redefined creativity and saw how their skills fit into their new paradigm.

Supervisors

Besides event planning, supervisors are another important component of creating spaces for student leaders to grow and practice creative skills. The study's participants described their supervisors as exposing them to new areas of interest, aiding in students' redefinition of creativity, and creating an environment for them to prototype and refine ideas. These responses show supervisors play an important role implicitly and explicitly in the creative development of students with whom they work. The participants' frequent mention of supervisors affirms the importance of creative mentors in developing creativity in college students, as proposed by Hulme et al. (2014) and Alencar et al. (2017). As educators, supervisors play a vital role in creating an environment that fosters creativity (Baillie, 2006; Jackson & Sinclair, 2006; Cole et al., 1999) since they play a part in shaping the culture of their offices in which students work and develop.

Along with the influence from supervisors, environment also significantly impacts creative development (Alencar et al., 2017; Hulme et al., 2014; Treffinger et al., 2002; Zhu & Zhang, 2011). An environment conducive to this development makes accessible the benefits gained through activities such as event planning. Conversely, an environment that does not allow the incorporation of interests into programming and requires student leaders to work in isolation will likely not result in students developing creative skills to the same extent, if at all. Participants in this study indicated that

supervisors provided spaces in which they were able to work together, experiment with new ideas, and see themselves as creative whether through planning logistics, how they communicated with others, or in how they thought about a particular issue.

A conclusion such as this is not entirely surprising, as the Student Programs office at the studied institution specifically placed value on creativity as a goal for the students within the office. Additionally, through the interviews, two RAs mentioned that their training discussed to some extent how to be creative in planning programs for their residence halls. Though participants may have had some instruction regarding creativity, the student leaders all demonstrated their internalized definitions and thoughts about what it meant to be creative in their specific context. This internalized creativity by the participants points to the relative success in how supervisors at this particular institution structured their students' leadership experiences and indicates the effectiveness of intentionality by supervisors who want to develop creativity in their student leaders.

Limitations

In any study, researchers face multiple setbacks and limitations, resulting in some potential impact to the overall applicability of the data. First, males had a considerably lower response rate (approximately 19% of total responses). Additionally, the participants were primarily white, with the only other identified ethnicity being "multiple ethnicity/other" (constituting approximately 9% of participants). These low percentages mean that the results may not be entirely representative of the views of all student leaders across the variables of gender and ethnicity. However, since all interview participants discussed a majority of the themes, it is unlikely that a larger sample size would have contributed significantly different results.

Secondly, the wording of one of the survey questions and the initial instructions were too vague, resulting in answers that were irrelevant to the study; those responses were therefore excluded. This question inquired whether the student leaders had been able to better make connections across various fields (intended to mean fields of information) due to their leadership experience. However, despite measures taken to ensure the clarity of the questions, the majority of participants (approximately 66%) interpreted this question to refer to connections in networking. Although these responses point to collaboration and Patterson (2012) discussed greater development of leadership capabilities in students involved in interdisciplinary student organizations, the question specifically inquired about associative thinking. Since this study defines creativity as an ability to make connections within a single field or between multiple fields of knowledge, this question was particularly important to determine if student leaders were developing an important trait of creative individuals.

Additionally, the instructions did not inform participants to answer according to the leadership positions that resulted in their selection to participate; thus, some (approximately 9%) responded in reference to a leadership role beyond the study's scope. These responses were discarded in order to more accurately provide an essence for two specific offices rather than a more shallow description over a broader variety of positions. Such miscommunications resulted in the loss of information that could have otherwise been used, had the wording of one question and the instructions been clearer.

The third limitation of this study was the timing of the survey and responses. The survey was sent out the week before students went on their spring break and was open for a month. Thus, by the time the survey responses were analyzed and interview

participants were solicited, students were preparing for their finals, and some declined interviews because they lacked the time to participate. Additionally, potential participants may have been fatigued, as the same group was also solicited concurrently for a separate research project. These factors of timing may have impacted the response rate and could account for some of the low turnout.

The final limitation is the potential for bias. Since the researcher held leadership positions as an undergraduate student and considers himself a creative individual, there is the possibility of some bias in the results. Still, the researcher took steps to ensure the validity of the data to eliminate biases and sought to transcend his bias save for when the researcher's experiences were needed to make connections and interpret the data, as prescribed by the hermeneutical phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1990). In addition to researcher bias, participant bias, though unlikely, may have also been present in this study. Since the solicitation email and survey both stated the study's focus on creativity and student leadership experiences, those who did not identify as creative individuals may have decided not to participate. This participant self-selection may have therefore skewed the results to appear more affirmative of development than they actually were. However, a wave analysis as described by Creswell (2012) indicates that participant bias is most likely not present in the survey results, as the results of the last participants were not significantly different from those of the first responders. Besides the survey respondents, interview participants were selected because they demonstrated most of the developmental outcomes ideal from a leadership experience and often provided specific examples of such development. Also, since volunteering for the interviews was optional, many individuals who said they did not experience some of the

developmental outcomes did not indicate interest in participating in the second part of the study. However, due to the nature of this study, there is little reason to believe that the selected participants were biased and provided information that would be significantly different from that provided by those who did not wish to be part of the interviews.

Implications for Practitioners

The results of this study indicate that a leadership experience may provide an effective conduit for the development of creativity in undergraduate students. This finding carries a variety of implications for practices to more effectively foster creativity through a leadership positions. Since supervisors were a reoccurring theme across participant responses, practitioners in student affairs should be particularly cognizant of how they structure their students' leadership experiences in order to maximize the impact it will have on the development of creativity in the students with whom they work.

First, a simple way for student affairs practitioners to develop creativity in student leaders is to encourage students to find ways to incorporate information and skills from their majors and classes in their roles. A major should be an easy place for students to find connections since they spend so much time in a specific field of knowledge, a component of creativity mentioned by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and Hulme et al. (2014). This practice should ideally give students practice in associative thinking in fields of information that may not naturally fit together. To further aid students in learning to make interdisciplinary connections, practitioners should encourage students to explore new areas of potential interests in disciplines outside their major and the inherent scope of their leadership position. Broadening interests gives students more outlets in which to make connections, providing greater innovation as they draw from diverse disciplines.

In addition to associative thinking, practitioners who wish to develop creativity in their students should promote a culture that both allows their students to find value in failures and to use this to prototype and refine ideas. These factors are interconnected as valuing failure encourages critical reflection of programs or important conversations. By reflecting, student leaders are given the opportunity to identify what went wrong or what could have been done more effectively and can then take this knowledge into account before planning a similar program or having another conversation with a resident. Such practices can be done both at an individual level as well as in a collaborative group setting, depending on what would be most helpful for the situation.

With fostering an ability to move past failures comes a measure of trust from supervisors. As students gain trust to make key decisions and undergo an iterative process, supervisors should remain cautious to intervene unless such involvement is necessary to avoid a disastrous or harmful situation. When failures do occur, supervisors can be key instigators in the iteration process by asking questions, allowing student leaders to reflect on what went wrong and how the failure could be an opportunity for growth. A supervisor's display of trust should provide space for student leaders to grow in their abilities to operate in complexity and ambiguity, give them a greater sense of creative self-efficacy, and help them better understand the value of failure.

Additionally, if a student affairs practitioner wishes to develop creativity in his or her students, simply stating or encouraging these practices is not enough. Program structures must be designed to require students to make interdisciplinary connections, broaden their interests, see the value in failure, and prototype and refine their ideas. Furthermore, supervisors need to encourage divergent thinking among their student

leaders. Considering the observations by Kharkhurin and Motalleebi (2008) regarding culture and creative development, convergent thinking in how a program should be organized or executed is likely to severely hinder creative development within an office. Thus, an office working with student leaders should be careful of striving for efficiency as the peak virtue of excellence, for such thought could result in a lack of creativity. In a culture that heavily favors convergent thinking in primary and secondary schooling (Robinson, 2006), the importance of promoting divergent thinking within student leadership experiences should be a crucial concern for student affairs practitioners who wish to foster creativity.

As students practice divergent thinking within their offices, supervisors should encourage them to incorporate information from various fields of knowledge and to learn from failures. This culture serves as a curriculum and set of practices for creativity in an office. Such heavy involvement in creative practice considers the observation by Astin (1984) that investment in curriculum produces learning and developmental outcomes. Thus, in order to develop creative characteristics in student leaders, they must be involved in a manner that requires them to utilize the desired skills. However, practitioners should carefully and purposefully structure the environment and learning activities to healthily promote skills and traits that allow the development of creativity.

Implications for Future Research

During this study, multiple topics emerged as potential areas for future research. First would be a similar study with students who hold other leadership positions in other campus areas such as intercultural services, service learning, advancement, or admissions to see if students' experiences in those offices impact their creative development. Such a

study could also provide a more comprehensive view of creative development across racial/ethnic demographics and see if any significant differences in thoughts regarding creativity are tied into a student's cultural background.

Future research could also include performing a study similar to this one at a variety of institutions to see if students' experiences in leadership impact their creative development in other ways on different campuses. Additionally, since the leadership roles examined in this study place some amount of emphasis on creativity, it would be interesting to examine institutions in which creativity is not emphasized by supervisors. Both of these areas of study could help to provide a more complete picture of specific ways in which creativity can be developed in different campus climates.

A third area for future research would be to find a reliable and accurate tool for measuring creativity and to perform a test before and after a student's experience in a leadership role. Such a tool would help provide quantitative data to better describe that magnitude in which leadership experiences impact development of creativity. An alternative to a qualitative protocol would be to utilize a self-assessment similar to one proposed by Cowan (2006). This technique requires students to audit their own creative growth and defend their opinion before a panel of judges who seek to ensure objectivity of the assessment. The results of the audits could then be compared across a sample of students. A study of this nature could also help to better assess the overall effectiveness of leadership experiences as a method of teaching creativity to undergraduate students.

Conclusion

Society today faces a variety of problems that require comprehensive, interdisciplinary approaches. As a result, colleges and universities are tasked with

determining how best to develop creativity in their students, as there is higher demand for creative and innovative graduates. In his discussion on involvement, Astin (1984) stated, “The theory of student involvement argues that a particular curriculum, to achieve the effects intended, must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development” (p. 522). Thus, when placed in spaces requiring them to utilize traits associated with creativity, student leaders should develop such characteristics. Since many traits and skills associated with creative individuals overlap with developmental goals for a leadership experience, this study sought to examine the impact of a leadership experience on the development of creativity in undergraduate students.

In order to assess this impact, the study addressed two research questions: Is creativity a developmental outcome of a student leadership experience? And what traits indicative of creative individuals are being developed in student leaders and how are these traits being developed? Students indicated development in an increased risk-taking tolerance, comfort with complexity and ambiguity, diversity in interests, an ability to prototype and refine ideas, an ability to make connections across disciplines, and creative self-efficacy. Factors in their experiences such as event planning, supervisors, and an environment that values creativity played roles in allowing students to develop creative skills and traits while also helping student leaders redefine creativity and gain creative self-efficacy if it was not present before. The participants of this study both demonstrated development of creative traits and attributed this development to their leadership experience. Thus, it would seem a leadership experience, if thoughtfully and purposefully structured, can be an effective medium by which one can teach creativity.

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Appendix A
Survey Protocol

Major:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Academic year:

Survey

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. Do not feel the need to come up with answers if nothing comes to mind.

What is your leadership position on campus?

Has your experience in student leadership impacted your ability to collaborate with others (for example, giving and receiving feedback)?

If so, in what ways?

Has your leadership experience allowed you develop a broader range of interests?

If so, in what ways?

Has your leadership experience further allowed you to develop existing diverse interests?

If so, in what ways?

Has your leadership experience given you the confidence to enter into complex situations (meaning situations in which there are numerous, interacting factors)?

If so, in what ways?

Has your leadership experience given you the confidence to enter into ambiguous and uncertain situations (meaning situations in which there is a lack of information)?

If so, in what ways?

Has your leadership experience given you the confidence to take risks?

If so, in what ways?

Has your leadership experience helped you to better make connections across multiple fields?

If so, please explain.

In your leadership position, are you given the opportunity to test and refine ideas?

If so, please explain.

Your responses to this survey are highly appreciated and are providing valuable information regarding creativity as a developmental outcome of a student leadership experience. Would you be willing to meet with the researcher to further discuss your answers? If so, please provide your name and Taylor email address.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

In the survey you indicated that *[insert phrase of interest from survey responses (ie. you gained comfort with taking risks from your experience as a Resident Assistant)]*. Would you be able to tell me a bit more about that experience?

What about your leadership experience allowed you to *[insert trait of growth (ie. gain comfort with taking risks)]*?

[Repeat above two questions for each response from the survey that was of interest or particularly unique.]

How would you define creativity?

Do you view yourself as a creative individual? Why or why not?

Do you think that your experience in leadership has impacted your definition of creativity? If so, in what ways?

Do you think that your experience in leadership has impacted whether or not you view yourself as a creative individual? If so, in what ways?

Appendix C

Survey Response Trends

Participant	Collaboration	New Interests	Old Interests	Complexity	Ambiguity	Risk Taking	Connections	Prototyping
1	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	somewhat/not sure	negative	negative
2	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive with limitation	positive with limitation	misunderstood the question	negative with exception
3	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	no response given	positive
4	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
5	positive with limitation	negative	positive	negative	negative with exception	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
6	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	somewhat/not sure
7	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive with limitation	positive	positive with limitation
8	positive	positive	positive with limitation	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
9	positive	positive with limitation	positive	positive	positive	positive with limitation	misunderstood the question	positive
10	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position
11	positive	negative	positive	positive with limitation	negative with exception	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
12	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position
13	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position	answered for other position
14	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
15	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive with limitation
16	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
17	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	negative	negative	negative	misunderstood the question	somewhat/not sure
18	no response given	positive	no response given	no response given	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
19	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
20	positive	positive with limitation	positive with limitation	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
21	positive	somewhat/not sure	somewhat/not sure	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
22	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
23	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
24	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	misunderstood the question	positive
25	positive	positive	negative with exception	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
26	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
27	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive	negative	misunderstood the question	negative
28	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive with limitation	positive	negative	negative
29	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
30	positive	positive	no response given	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
31	positive	negative	negative	positive	positive with limitation	positive	misunderstood the question	positive
32 (pilot)	positive	positive	positive with limitation	positive	positive	positive	misunderstood the question	positive



