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## Exploring Alumni Valuation of an Undergraduate Leadership Program

John D. Egan

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# EXPLORING ALUMNI VALUATION OF AN UNDERGRADUATE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

by

JOHN EGAN

(Under the Direction of Juliann Sergi McBrayer)

## ABSTRACT

This study explored alumni' valuation of an undergraduate leadership program by gaining an understanding of what leadership learning and leadership behaviors transferred into their work environments. The alumni graduated from the same university in the southeastern United States, and while enrolled completed a four-year, co-curricular leadership program. In this mixed methods study, eight participant alumni engaged in semi-structured interviews as well as completed the Leadership Practices Inventory. Alumni perceived that leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection were the most valuable attributes of the program. The leadership learning that effectively transferred to work environments included collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, negotiating conflict, strengths awareness, emotional intelligence awareness, and leadership confidence. Program alumni were frequently engaged in the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership at work to some degree. Some recommendations include the program should be more career focused and expressed desire for an alumni group. This study fills a gap in the literature as limited research exists that assesses the transfer of leadership learning from an undergraduate leadership program into alumni work environments. When developing leadership programs, practitioners may consider incorporating similar programmatic attributes and leadership learning deemed valuable by program alumni.

INDEX WORDS: Undergraduate leadership development, Transfer of leadership learning, Alumni perspective, Experiential learning theory, Transformational leadership, Five practices of exemplary leadership, Leadership program

EXPLORING ALUMNI VALUATION OF AN UNDERGRADUATE LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAM

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

To my precious Olivia. Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 80% of employers desire leadership skills to be evident on the resumes of new college graduates (2016). The NACE 2016 Job Outlook Survey included 201 employer respondents, and leadership skills was the highest sought attribute of college graduates. This report supports the expectation society places on higher education to produce graduates who are prepared to be leaders. Responding to this expectation, many institutions have chosen to maintain leadership programs that take on a variety of structures ranging from curricular to co-curricular programs. The International Leadership Association's program directory contains more than 1,600 programs offering a leadership certificate or degree across multiple disciplines (2017). Programs have also been developed for specific groups of students as one study concluded that for pharmacy students alone, 191 leadership development opportunities have been identified at U.S. institutions such as courses, speakers, programs, and projects (Feller, Doucette & Witry, 2016). The researchers that surveyed these opportunities stated that more needed to be done to assess these leadership offerings to improve programming and to measure learning outcomes. Poignantly, Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) stated, "The important work of leadership education begins and ends with assessment" (p. 146).

An effort by leadership educators and researchers has been made to explore leadership pedagogy, and have found classroom dynamics, action-oriented components, reflection, strengths awareness, and other attributes associated with quality leadership programs are important to leadership learning (Eich, 2008; Fritz & Guthrie, 2017; Odom, 2015; Soria, Roberts & Reinhard, 2015; White & Guthrie, 2016). Additional research points to on-campus experiences that are important for leadership development including: mentoring, leadership

programs, student leadership positions, multicultural discussions, employment, leadership classes, service, service-learning, and program of study (Boettcher & Gansemar-Topf, 2015; Bond & Sterrett, 2014; Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Facca-Miess, 2015; Frey, 2011; Gallagher, Marshall, Pories, & Daughtey, 2014; Posner, Crawford & Denniston-Stewart, 2015; Vasbinder, 2012). While much of this research is centered around student development on college campuses, very little research explores to what extent alumni utilize this leadership learning in their work environment after graduation.

### **Background**

This background includes transformational leadership theory, experiential learning theory, The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, factors contributing to undergraduate leadership development, pedagogy in leadership education, the transfer of leadership behaviors from training to work environments, and assessing leadership programming through alumni feedback. This abridged review of the literature includes primarily current, published, peer-reviewed, primary research, as well as seminal texts relevant to the theoretical framework.

### **Transformational Leadership**

The shift of leadership scholarship from a leader-centric perspective to a focus on followers began with Burns (1978) setting the foundation for transformational leadership by positing that leaders should look to the needs or desires of followers while jointly increasing inspiration, and a sense of morality. Bass (1985) refined this concept further through a more concrete framework with four dimensions including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transformational leadership continues to be prominent in scholarship as Dinh et al. (2014) identified 154 articles in 10 journals from 2000 to 2012 that incorporated this theory. Moreover, Ghasabeh, Soosay, and Reaiche (2015)

believed that due to the complexity of global markets, transformational leadership may be superior when compared to other leadership frameworks.

### **The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership**

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership provide a clear, prescriptive approach for engaging in transformational leadership, and was generated through interviews with thousands of leaders about their personal best leadership experiences (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). The practices include Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. These practices have been formulated into the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) assessment tool, which measures the frequency with which individuals engage in leadership behaviors tied to these practices (Posner, 2016). Kouzes and Posner also wrote a book, *The Student Leadership Challenge*, intended for the leadership development of students, as well as a student leadership assessment tool called the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (S-LPI; Kouzes & Posner, 2014).

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

Experiential learning theory, as described by Kolb (1984), involves the transformation of experience into learning. The experiential learning cycle has four modes including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Concrete experience is the active participation in an experience without partiality, and this is followed by reflective observation, which entails reflecting on experiences while contemplating multiple perspectives. The learner then develops a working theory that integrates these reflections through the third mode of abstract conceptualization. Finally, in the active experimentation mode, these developed theories are put to use when solving problems or making decisions. Experiential learning theory is an important underpinning framework for leadership

education (White & Guthrie, 2016). This theory has been utilized by multiple researchers in a variety of studies involving leadership learning with undergraduates (Burbank, Odom, & Sandlin, 2015; Eich, 2008; Facca-Miess, 2015; Maellaro, 2013; Manning-Ouellette & Black, 2017; White & Guthrie, 2016) and is therefore suitable as a helpful lens for this study.

### **Undergraduate Leadership Development**

A longitudinal study by Posner et al., (2015) provided a baseline insight that undergraduates can increase their usage of leadership behaviors on campus. This expansive study included 2,855 students placed in three cohorts at a Canadian University. The participants completed the S-LPI in their first, and third years of college. The study showed a statistically significant finding of an increase in four of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership from year-one to year-three. Interestingly, students' program of study led to a variety of leadership development patterns suggesting that a student's major may have some bearing on leadership development. This study did not explore other factors that contributed to the participants' leadership development, but rather showed that college students can increase their capacity to engage in leadership behaviors.

In their landmark study, Dugan and Komives (2007) explored factors that contribute to the leadership development of undergraduates through an extensive study with over 50,000 students at 52 campuses. This Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) included a questionnaire that measured leadership outcomes or values found in the Social Change Model (SCM) through the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS), and also probed students' experiences on campuses. The SCM outcomes or leadership values included: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change. The study led to the identification of six experiences on college

campuses that affect the leadership development of students including socio-cultural discussions, mentoring, campus involvement, service, student leadership roles, and leadership programming (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Due to the large scope of this work, this study effectively sets the stage for a deeper exploration into the factors contributing to leadership development for undergraduates, and it will be referenced in future sections of the background.

### **Student Leadership Positions**

Having a student leadership position on campus was shown to have a positive impact on every SCM leadership value (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Even the number of leadership positions held can have an impact on leadership development (Gallagher et al., 2014). This was revealed in a study that included 1,103 freshmen, juniors, and seniors, while utilizing the S-LPI along with other variables including race, age, gender, transfer student, freshman seminar course, and number of leadership positions held (Gallagher et al., 2014). Organization leadership experiences were significantly correlated with four of the five leadership practices, and lower scores were found in those students who did not have a leadership role. Interestingly, students who had held three or more leadership positions scored higher on most of the practices than students who held only one position.

Bond and Sterrett (2014) found that officers of Kappa Delta Pi (KDP), an honorary professional association focused on education, were able to describe 18 different learned leadership skills and verbalized increased leadership confidence. Frey (2011) utilized 15 different experiences within student leadership positions as independent variables with the S-LPI as the dependent variable with 141 undergraduates. A significant correlation was found between 13 of the 15 experiences and some of the leadership practices. Two of the measured experiences found in a student leadership position had a significant impact on all five practices. These two

experiences included leadership positions that involved organizing members to implement an event and leading others through meetings or decision-making conversations. Several other studies also supported the conclusion that leadership positions, and campus involvement are important for undergraduate leadership development (Burbank et al., 2015; Foreman & Retallick, 2013; Patterson, 2012).

### **Leadership Programming**

Dugan and Komives' (2007) landmark study showed that long-term leadership programs led to an increase in leadership efficacy for undergraduates and had a positive impact on the citizenship leadership value when compared to short-term programming. Posner's (2009) seminal work is important to include as it compares the leadership gains of students who did or did not participate in specific leadership training. The study utilized a *t*-test comparison of S-LPI scores for seniors who completed leadership training through a business major (treatment group) and seniors who did not complete this training within other majors. The treatment group had significantly higher usage of four leadership practices including: Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart (Posner, 2009).

Through the assessment of a leadership program for pharmacy students, one qualitative study found that those students who participated in a year-long, co-curricular program had an increased desire to obtain leadership roles and felt better prepared for leadership positions (Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013). Moreover, participants could link their leadership learning with specific program aspects and stated they knew more about leadership as a result of the program. The evaluation led to the conclusion that the expressed purpose of helping students develop their leadership abilities was accomplished by the program.

### **Campus Mentors**

Mentors on campus have a significant impact on the leadership development of undergraduates. Having a faculty mentor was a primary predictor of almost every SCM leadership value, and employer mentors contributed to the leadership efficacy of undergraduates (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Another study using MSL data included 36,197 participants who had a mentor in college, and this study delved deeper into the leadership development variable of mentorship (Campbell, Smith, Dugan, & Komives, 2012). While controlling for other variables, the study showed that mentoring did have an impact (8% of the variance) on the complete index of the eight SCM values found in the SRLS, and student affairs mentors had the greatest impact on this index. Finally, mentoring focused on personal development and leadership empowerment were both related to positive leadership outcomes. Another study indicated that mentoring may be an underutilized leadership development tool within leadership programming on college campuses (Lunsford & Brown, 2017).

### **Service and Service-Learning**

Service had a moderate effect on the SCM leadership values in Dugan and Komives (2007) study, and additional studies support the role of service and service-learning in undergraduate leadership development (Burbank et al., 2015; Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014). Buschlen and Warner (2014) conducted a qualitative study that included five students and a faculty advisor who repaired homes on a service trip after a natural disaster. The participants expressed transformational learning that could be tied to the SCM leadership values. Another study utilized a pre-test and post-test with the S-LPI, and included 65 students in a management course that implemented a public health fair (Foli et al., 2014). Significant gains were found for all five practices due to this service-learning experience. Additional studies have

also pointed to the importance of service or service learning for undergraduate leadership development (Burbank et al., 2015; Dugan & Komives, 2010).

### **Pedagogy in Leadership Education**

Pedagogy within leadership programs and coursework is an important consideration for leadership educators. In a grounded theory study, Eich (2008) identified 16 attributes organized into three clusters that are found in high-quality leadership programs. This landmark study included 62 interviews with multiple stakeholders from four specific leadership programs that met specific criteria to be designated as a high-quality program. The first cluster focused on a learning community in which students helped each other develop their leadership abilities. This first cluster included the following attributes: students from diverse backgrounds that challenge each other, formation of smaller group to enhance learning, and accessible leadership educators. The next cluster centered on experiential learning, and the attributes consisted of group work on projects, service, and leadership retreats. These experiences were enhanced through intentional reflection, and leadership self-assessment tools. The final cluster revealed that the best programs utilized evidence-based practices, are founded in research, and continually develop through assessment (Eich, 2008).

Reflection, action-oriented components, and classroom dynamics are also important pedagogical considerations for leadership learning. White and Guthrie (2016) analyzed journal entries and conducted 14 interviews with students who completed leadership coursework and determined that the following practices enriched leadership learning: fostering a reflective culture, collective reflection through discussion, and instructors who practice reflection. Additional studies also bolster the importance of reflection as a teaching strategy in leadership education (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013; Odom, 2015). Studies involving action-oriented

or experiential attributes such as a kayaking trip, disaster relief, volunteering off campus, and executing a public health fair have all shown some form of leadership development gains for students (Boettcher & Gansemar-Topf, 2015; Buschlen & Warner, 2014; Foli et al., 2014; Strawn, McKim, & Velez, 2017). Finally, Fritz and Guthrie (2017) examined the importance of various classroom dynamics as they interviewed 15 students who were enrolled in or had taken a leadership course. Small classroom size, diversity among student majors, and having quality faculty were found to be valuable for values clarification in leadership courses. Small classroom sizes were also confirmed as an important pedagogical factor in Odom's (2015) study, which involved the qualitative analysis of 28 students' end-of-course reflections.

### **Transfer of Leadership Behaviors**

Much of the scholarship involving the transfer of learning from leadership programs or training into work is centered on programs developed for working professionals. One example involved a phenomenological study with alumni participants of a leadership development program designed for professional women (Brue & Brue, 2016). The participants believed the program increased their leadership capacity, and some reported being promoted after the program. Another important result was a positive change in leadership efficacy. Similarly, an assessment of a leadership program designed for eight county human service organizations showed that 21% of the participants had been promoted a year after the programs completion (Coloma, Gibson, & Packard, 2012). Half of the participants reported using ten of the 15 leadership content areas at work. Finally, an assessment of the National Clinic Leadership Development Program in Ireland revealed that after the program, managers observed new leadership behaviors and attitudes of the 36 participating nurses (Patton et al., 2013). These studies indicated that leadership learning and behaviors could transfer from leadership training

into the work environment. However, limited research exists that shows this same transfer from undergraduate leadership programming to the professional environment.

### **Alumni Leadership Assessments in Higher Education**

A few peer-reviewed publications exist that explored the transfer of leadership learning from higher education to the work context of alumni. One such study focused on adjusting curriculum at a military medical school by sending a questionnaire to alumni that included the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire-6S and open-ended questions pertaining to leadership (Dong et al., 2012). The participants believed they were appropriately prepared by the school for their leadership role and could identify specific experiences at the institution that enhanced their leadership development. Kelley (2008) conducted a study with 134 former fraternity presidents, and 10 years after holding this position almost all reported this experience positively influenced their leadership development, while 80% were supervisors at work. These two studies showed that leadership learning at institutions of higher education can continue to be relevant for alumni in a future work environment; however, neither study involved a leadership program.

One dissertation explored the lived experiences of 11 alumni from a leadership program and minor at a liberal arts college (Soesbe, 2012). The three semi-structured interviews with participants revealed that the program continues to have a positive impact in their current context, and experiential attributes of the program significantly enhanced their leadership development. Due to the program, alumni expressed having more self-awareness, and could leverage these insights in a way that gave them increased confidence as a leader. Additional exploration is warranted to better understand how alumni from undergraduate leadership programs are transferring leadership learning into their professional context, and the value they prescribe to the program.

In summary, the background included transformational leadership and experiential learning theory as theoretical frameworks for this study. Undergraduate leadership learning does occur on college campuses, and various factors contributed to this development including student leadership positions, campus involvement, leadership programming, mentors, and service. Important pedagogical practices for leadership educators included building learning communities among students, reflection, action-oriented components, and classroom dynamics. Finally, studies have shown that leadership learning can transfer from professional training into work environments, but few studies explore this transfer from an undergraduate leadership development program.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the United States, a societal expectation is placed on institutions of higher education to produce graduates who are productive leaders in the workplace. To address this need, many institutions have created or maintained various forms of leadership programming for students. Leadership educators must continually assess their programs to demonstrate efficacy, to make improvements, and to ensure institutional support. Much of the literature involving the assessment of undergraduate leadership programs is focused on the leadership development of students while they are on campus. Limited research exists that assesses the transfer of leadership learning and behaviors to the work environment through understanding alumni' valuation of undergraduate leadership programming. There is an institutional need to justify leadership programs, and administration must depend on leadership educators to provide meaningful information on whether or not program graduates' learned leadership behaviors are transferring into work environments.

The leadership program under review in this study, under the pseudonym Empower Leaders, was a four-year, co-curricular leadership program, which necessitated that students meet the following requirements: complete four non-credit-bearing leadership courses, attend leadership workshops, attend a leadership conference, complete 125 community service hours, serve as a peer leadership educator, join a service trip, and complete a capstone project.

Exploring how this leadership learning experience was valuable to program alumni in their work environment, as well as understanding the leadership behaviors they engaged in at work will allow leadership educators to better comprehend the influence of their programs beyond graduation. In addition, this study sought to assess the efficacy of programmatic attributes, which may allow leadership educators to replicate effective attributes that are relevant to their context.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore alumni' valuation of an undergraduate leadership program by gaining an understanding of what leadership learning and leadership behaviors have transferred into their work environment.

### **Research Questions**

This mixed-methods study included alumni from a large university in the southeastern United States who completed a co-curricular, four-year leadership development program. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants, and participants also completed the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) to determine the frequency with which they engaged in leadership behaviors while at work (Posner, 2016). This information was collected in response to the following overarching research question: What is the perceived value of an undergraduate

leadership program for alumni in their professional career? To explore this question, the following sub-questions further guided this study:

1. What attributes of the program have the most perceived value for program alumni?
2. What leadership learning effectively transfers into the work environments of program alumni?
3. What additional leadership learning would have been beneficial that was not included in the program?
4. How frequently do alumni who completed an undergraduate leadership program engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership?

### **Significance of the Study**

The literature surrounding the leadership development of undergraduates involved gathering information from current students. Very few studies explored the implications of previous undergraduate leadership development in the lives of alumni. This study may serve as a baseline or starting point for the professional literature in terms of assessing the transfer of leadership learning and leadership behaviors from an undergraduate leadership program into the work environments of alumni. This study may also provide practitioners a model for assessing undergraduate leadership programs through the utilization of the alumni perspective. Finally, because the program assessed in this study was revealed as valuable to the professional lives of alumni, practitioners may choose to include similar attributes within their programming.

### **Procedures**

#### **Research Design**

The specific design for this study was a convergent embedded mixed methods design, which was utilized to explore the perceived value alumni placed on an undergraduate leadership

program by gaining an understanding of what leadership learning and leadership behaviors have transferred into their work environment. This design involved a single data collection phase of both qualitative and quantitative data with priority given to one form of data (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the priority data was qualitative, and more specifically this included what Merriam and Tisdell (2016) have termed basic qualitative research. This design included a semi-structured interview with program graduates, as well as the completion of the LPI instrument, which measures the frequency of using The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2014).

The study sought to include a targeted number of eight participants who graduated from a large university in the southeastern United States who completed their undergraduate degrees, as well as a four-year leadership development program between 2012 and 2018. This number of participants was sufficient to answer the research questions as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that there is not a correct number but rather this decision is best made by focusing on what is required to address the questions posed. Purposeful sampling was utilized, and the participants were selected due to their previous participation in a specific leadership program while an undergraduate. Criterion sampling was also implemented to select the participants, which included three primary criteria including: completed all elements of the Empower Leaders program, employed at least part-time, and the technological capability to engage in a web-based video interview. Additional criteria focused on diversity in graduation date, undergraduate major, gender, and race. These diversification criteria closely reflected those used by Soesbe (2012) in the exploration of the lived experiences of alumni from a leadership program at a liberal arts college.

Although qualitative and quantitative data were collected asynchronously as a part of a single phase, a description of the data collection process is best described through two stages. The first stage utilized the LPI to collect quantitative data for this study (Posner, 2016). After informed consent was received, the researcher electronically sent an email link to the participant that included the LPI. This instrument contained 30 behavior statements on a 10-point frequency scale, from almost never to almost always, to measure the frequency with which respondents engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). The assessment resulted in an index score for each of the five practices that is generated by responses to six behavior statements that are tied to each practice. There was a maximum score of 60 and a minimum score of six for each of the practices. The LPI was reliable as a small effect size (below .10) has been revealed between the LPI-Self, and the LPI-Observer (Posner, 2016). The LPI-Observer is a 360-degree feedback instrument that allows observers to score other individuals using the same behavior statements. Finally, the LPI was internally reliable with a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) above .80 for each of the five practices (Posner, 2016).

Qualitative data were gathered during the second stage of data collection. The researcher served as a human instrument in the collection and interpretation of qualitative data. An interview protocol was developed for the purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews, and one-hour interviews occurred through a web-based video application. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that this approach reduces research costs and permits studies that are not bound by geography as participants in this study were in various locations.

Analysis of the qualitative data was guided by Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral, and specific coding methods were utilized including structural, initial, evaluation, and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2009). The researcher sought to identify five to six themes from the

data in an effort to address the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Analysis of the quantitative data involved only descriptive statistics using the LPI scores. Individual scores were calculated for the purpose of generating a mean and standard deviation of the participants for each of the five practices. These means scores were compared with available normative data, as well as with qualitative data.

### **Participants**

The participants had finished a leadership program at a single large institution in the southeastern United States that included non-credit leadership courses and multiple program requirements. For the purposes of this study the program was given the pseudonym Empower Leaders. Multiple learning objectives were layered across program components and were framed around the following areas of focus: self-leadership, collaboration, community and organizational leadership and leadership legacy (see Appendix A). The program requirements (see Appendix B) included attending workshops, attending a leadership conference, completing 125 service hours, participating in a service trip on a school break, and a capstone leadership legacy project. Students created their own capstone project which must be feasible, have a meaningful impact on some community, and must be sustainable beyond the student's direct involvement. Students are encouraged to form teams or partnerships to execute their unique projects.

In addition to these program requirements, participant's completed either three or four non-credit leadership courses depending on when they finished the program. The courses were titled Self-Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Leading Positive Change, and Professional Development Seminar, which was added to the program in 2013. Syllabi for the first three courses respectively can be found in Appendices C, D, and E. These three courses each used the

same text titled *The Student Leadership Challenge: Five Practices for Becoming an Exemplary Leader*, which led students through The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2014).

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*Leadership Behaviors* – Leadership behaviors are specifically in alignment with The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership including: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2014).

*Leadership Learning* – Leadership learning includes any items learned regarding leadership knowledge, skills, self-awareness or abilities that are not explicitly tied to The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

*Transformational Leadership* – A leadership process that increases the morality and motivation of followers by focusing on their wants, needs, and desires. This non-leader-centric theory is focused on meeting the needs of followers and results in a transformation that leads followers to achieve more than would typically be expected of them (Bass, 1978, Northouse, 2016).

*Work Environment* – For the purposes of this study, the work environment will include any setting in which an individual receives pay for some form of labor services.

### **Chapter Summary**

U.S. society is depending on institutions of higher learning to produce the future leaders of industry and citizenship. Employers also recognize the importance of leadership skills in their new graduate hiring preferences. In response, institutions have been developing and refining leadership programs for undergraduates. Studies have since supported that these programs and

other attributes contribute to the leadership development of undergraduates. However, these studies mostly assessed the leadership behaviors of students while on campus and have not explored how leadership behaviors have transferred into the work environments of alumni.

The purpose of this study was to explore alumni' valuation of an undergraduate leadership program by gaining an understanding of what leadership learning and leadership behaviors have transferred into their work environment. The LPI was used to capture the leadership behaviors of participants, and a semi-structured interview was conducted to further address the research questions. This study is significant because it may fill a gap in the literature by capturing the lived experiences of program alumni and includes a leadership behaviors instrument. It may also benefit practitioners by providing a program assessment tool, and the potential revelation of an effective program model that could be replicated.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

U.S. society expects institutions of higher education to prepare future leaders who drive economic growth and serve as active citizens. Currently, “many college mission statements contain commitments to develop citizen leaders or prepare students for professional and community responsibilities...” (Council for the Advancement of Standards [CAS] in Higher Education, 2012, p. 447). Moreover, employers are seeking college graduates who are prepared to lead within their organizations. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2016) found that 80% of employers are looking for leadership skills to be displayed on the resumes of new graduates. This constituted the highest sought-after attribute of the 201 employers who participated in the survey.

In response, many institutions have developed various leadership programs and even leadership centers for undergraduates. At the end of the 1980s over 600 institutions included leadership courses, and in the late 1990s over 800 collegiate leadership programs were in existence (CAS, 2012). Currently, the International Leadership Association’s program directory revealed that there are over 1,600 programs in the United States involving various disciplines that grant either a certificate or some type of degree, both graduate and undergraduate, involving leadership (2017). Leadership programming has also been developed for specific types of students and degree programs. For instance, a review of leadership training exclusively for pharmacy students revealed 191 leadership development opportunities across the country including courses, speakers, programs, and projects (Feller et al., 2016). Among other conclusions, these authors stated that more assessment of these opportunities were needed to better understand student learning outcomes for improving program designs.

Leadership educators and researchers have been completing program assessments and exploring the factors that contribute to the leadership development of undergraduates. The literature has shown that a variety of factors contribute to leadership development of undergraduates including: mentoring, employment, leadership programs, leadership classes, student leadership positions, multicultural discussions, service, service-learning and program of study (Campbell et al., 2012; Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Foremen & Retallick, 2013; Foli et al., 2014; Gallagher et al., 2014; Posner, 2009; Posner et al., 2015). However, most studies have only assessed the leadership development of students actively on campus. There is limited understanding of how leadership learning and behaviors are transferring or not transferring into the professional work environments of alumni.

### **Literature Search**

The search for literature was primarily conducted through the Discover@Georgia Southern library search tool which simultaneously accesses multiple academic journals and databases. Multiple limitations were applied within this search tool that included: online only, peer-reviewed only, academic journals only, and exclusion of content published prior to 2007. Search terms included phrases such as *undergraduate leadership development*, *transformational leadership undergraduate*, *transfer leadership behaviors*, *leadership practices inventory*, *college leadership program*, *leadership program alumni*, *socially responsible leadership* and *leadership program assessment*. A similar search was also conducted specifically in the Journal of Leadership Education, and the Journal of Leadership Studies. Finally, the *cited by* feature in Google Scholar was utilized to retrieve peer-reviewed articles that referenced the studies already

identified through the previously mentioned process. The publication date range for this review spans from 1978 to 2017 to include seminal and landmark studies.

### **Organization of the Literature Review**

The review of the literature will be focused on current, published, peer-reviewed, primary research relevant to this study. In a few cases exceptions were made from this criterion and these included: seminal books relevant to the theoretical framework, landmark studies or reports pertaining to undergraduate leadership, and dissertations relevant to this study that touched on content not explored in peer-reviewed publications. Due to the expansive scope of leadership scholarship, this review required a concentration on transformational leadership, experiential learning theory, undergraduate leadership development, pedagogy in leadership education, and the transfer of leadership behaviors from training into the work environment. A description and evolution of leadership theories, as well as a history of undergraduate leadership programming was excluded, as these topics were deemed less relevant to the study. The review of the literature will provide important insights, context, and meaning to the study by covering relevant topics organized into the following sections: (a) transformational leadership and experiential learning as a theoretical frameworks, (b) factors contributing to undergraduate leadership development, (c) pedagogy within leadership education and programming, (d) leadership behaviors transferring into work environments, (e) assessing leadership programming through alumni feedback, and (f) a rich description of the leadership program under review.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Burns (1978) put forward the foundation for transformational leadership that helped move the leadership field of study from a leader-centric approach to a focus on meeting the needs of followers. He proposed that “leaders address themselves to followers’ wants, needs,

and other motivations...” (p.20), while both parties increase each other’s levels of inspiration and goodness. This ethereal conceptualization of leadership became more concrete in the work of Bass (1985) as he advanced transformational leadership through four dimensions including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Northouse’s (2016) review of leadership theories, included the following definition of transformational leadership:

...the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leaders and the follower. This type of leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential. (p. 162)

This leadership conceptualization has continued as a relevant framework in practice and research.

Transformational leadership remains a dominant theoretical approach for understanding leadership. Dinh et al. (2014) analyzed primary research articles focused on leadership from 2000 to 2012 within 10 different journals. Transformational leadership was utilized in 154 out of 752 articles, making it the second most utilized theoretical framework. Recently, Ghasabeh et al., (2015) have theorized that transformational leadership is more relevant than other leadership frameworks for organizations competing in the current complex, globalized marketplace. The practice of transformational leadership was made more tangible for leaders in a variety of settings through the creation of *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* (Kouzes & Posner, 2014)

### **The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership**

Through interviews with thousands of leaders about their personal best leadership experiences, The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership were created within a transformational leadership framework (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). These case studies with leaders across the globe led to the identification of five leadership practices including: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. In their text, Kouzes and Posner provided a rich description of the practices, as well as stories of student application for the purpose of enhancing student leadership development (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). A deeper understanding of each practice is essential for the comprehension of this study.

**Model the way.** Model the way is typified by a leader who sets the example for his or her followers. Leaders should clarify their values, affirm the values of the group, and then align their behaviors with these deeply held beliefs (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15).

**Inspire a shared vision.** This practice involves imagining and communicating a better, more exciting future for a group or organization. The leader casts a common vision that taps into the aspirations of the group, while bringing excitement to heightened, future possibilities (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15).

**Challenge the process.** Leaders should look outside of the known information the group possesses to discover better ways of doing things. Willing to leave the status quo behind, leaders engaged in challenge the process are not content with doing things the way they have always

been done. This practice involves advancing the group through taking risks and finding incremental steps to success (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15).

**Enable others to act.** Leaders understand that they cannot be successful doing the work alone. They must build effective teams by developing relationships and trust. Encouraging collaboration, the leader seeks to empower and improve others while giving followers the autonomy to do their work (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15).

**Encourage the heart.** Encourage the heart is typified by the celebration of success, while paying homage to the groups’ deeply held beliefs. The leader shows appreciation to individuals who deserve recognition and understands the group needs encouragement in order to continue pressing forward (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15).

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

Kolb’s (1984) seminal text described that experiential learning theory is founded on previous works of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. The central concept is that “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of

experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). There are multiple layers found within this theory including an incorporation of learning styles (Kolb, 1984). However, of relevance to this study is Kolb’s (1984) experiential cycle of learning that includes the following four modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This cycle begins with concrete observation, which includes being openly involved in an experience without partiality. Reflective observation is then the reflection on experiences while bringing multiple perspective to bear. Abstract conceptualization entails developing theories that integrate ideas rooted in reflection, and finally active experimentation is the usage of these theories in problem solving or decision making (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb (1984) described learning as a process that involves the resolving of conflict and tension between opposing modes found along two dimensions. This confrontation leads to the learning of new skills, beliefs, and knowledge. Conceptually it is helpful to imagine the first dimension involving the modes of concrete experience and abstract conceptualization on opposite ends of a y-axis. These modes are opposed as concrete experiences is apprehended through the tangibles found in an immediate experience while abstract conceptualization is comprehended through reflective interpretation. The second dimension along the x-axis includes the modes of reflective observation and active experimentation. This dimension involves transforming intentional reflection into action that is extended into the world. In summary, learning is the transformation of experiences (Kolb, 1984).

This learning theory has been previously applied to leadership learning in an undergraduate context. Manning-Ouellette and Black (2017) applied experiential learning as a theoretical framework when comparing assignments between an online section and traditional section of the same undergraduate leadership course. Maellaro (2013) proposed a reflective

learning journal assignment that would allow students to work through all four modes of Kolb's learning cycle to increase the likelihood that leadership learning would be applied in the workplace. "When students do not move through the complete model, they are less likely to take what they learn from the classroom to the workplace" (Maellaro, 2013, p. 234). Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory has been utilized in multiple leadership studies involving learning found within this literature review (Burbank et al., 2015; Eich, 2008; Facca-Miess, 2015; White & Guthrie, 2016). White and Guthrie (2016) stated, "Experiential learning theory provides a solid foundation for leadership education" (p. 61). Thus, it is an appropriate framework that can be utilized when exploring leadership learning and the application of leadership knowledge.

### **Undergraduate Leadership Development**

Undergraduate students can increase their leadership capacity while in college. Posner et al., (2015) conducted a longitudinal study at a Canadian university in which three cohorts of students ( $n = 2,855$ ) were shown to have increased usage of leadership behaviors from entry to year three in college. The S-LPI was sent to all entering freshmen that formed three cohorts in 2006, 2007, and 2008. Those that participated were given the instrument again at the conclusion of their first and third years of study. The authors revealed a statistically significant increase in four of the five practices from year one to year three for students. This study did not investigate specific factors that affect leadership behavior, but its relevance is found in the provision of a general baseline of evidence that leadership development can occur during the college experience.

Dugan and Komives (2007) conducted an extensive, landmark leadership study with undergraduates that included more than 50,000 students at 52 campuses responding to the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) survey. The survey included the Socially Responsible

Leadership Scale (SRLS) that was used to categorize leadership outcomes based on the Social Change Model (SCM) of leadership values that include: Consciousness of Self, Congruence, Commitment, Collaboration, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility, Citizenship, and Change. The survey also included the following additional elements: a leadership efficacy scale, retrospective questions focused on variables prior to college, and questions exploring experiences in college. Due to the large scope of their work, this study effectively sets the stage for a deeper exploration into the factors contributing to leadership development for undergraduates.

The study identified six college experiences that matter in terms of leadership development including: socio-cultural discussions, mentoring, campus involvement, service, student leadership roles, and leadership programming (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Faculty mentoring was one of the top predictors of almost all SCM values, and employer mentoring was tied to leadership efficacy. Any amount of participation in student organizations resulted in higher SCM leadership values, and service had a moderate effect on these leadership outcomes. Holding a student leadership position for a club, organization or team had a positive influence in every SCM value and leadership efficacy. The study reported that 46% of seniors never had the opportunity to serve in a leadership position on campus. Finally, even students who attended short-term or a one-time leadership lecture had higher leadership outcomes. Long-term leadership programs led to increases in the citizenship value and resulted in higher leadership efficacy outcomes when compared to shorter programs (Dugan & Komives, 2007).

In 2010 the researchers utilized this previously collected data from the MLS to further explore the college experiences that predicted leadership outcomes and examined the role of self-efficacy on these outcomes by focusing on college seniors in the dataset (Dugan & Komives,

2010). The study included 14,252 undergraduate seniors from 25 different states and included 50 institutions. The findings from the continuation of this research revealed that socio-cultural conversations while in college had the strongest positive relationship and was a significant predictor across all eight SCM leadership outcomes (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Mentor relationships with faculty had a significant positive relationship with seven of the eight measures excluding Collaboration. Community service was a significant predictor of six outcomes with the exception of Consciousness of Self and Change. The Collaboration outcome was significantly influenced by participation in student organizations, and peer mentoring influenced Commitment and Citizenship. Short-term leadership training led to significant predictive relationship with Collaboration, moderate leadership training led to significant predictive relationship with Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility and Citizenship. Participation in long-term leadership programs led to negative relationships of significance with Consciousness of Self, Congruence, Commitment and Controversy with Civility. The authors suggested this unexpected finding may have been due to differences in quality and content in long-term programs that could include leader-centric approaches, which are counter to the SRLS instrument. Finally, leadership self-efficacy explained between eight to twelve percent of variance for the eight outcomes and was a significant predictor of all the outcomes (Dugan & Komives, 2010).

This expansive undergraduate leadership study does not necessarily point to confirmed causal relationships due to its non-experimental nature but does provide strong evidence for college experience variables that influence leadership outcomes. Moreover, this study provides a useful, topical approach for further exploration into the factors that affect undergraduate leadership development. This section of the review of the literature will cover primarily current,

peer-reviewed publications on the following factors that have been linked to undergraduate leadership development outcomes: student leadership positions and involvement on campus; leadership programs; service and service-learning; employment during college; mentors; and program of study.

### **Student Leadership Positions and Campus Involvement**

Holding student leadership positions on college campuses has been linked with increased usage of leadership behaviors. A study that involved a convenience sample of 1,103 freshmen, juniors, and seniors in classes at a mid-size university in the southern United States showed this connection (Gallagher et al., 2014). Each participant completed a survey that included the S-LPI along with other variables: race, age, gender, transfer student, freshman seminar course, and number of leadership positions held. A leadership experience score was generated for each participant that consisted of the total number of leadership experiences reported. The data were analyzed through *t*-tests, correlations, and one-way analysis of variance. The authors concluded there was a significant correlation between four of the leadership practices excluding Enable Others to Act and the organizational leadership experience score. Those students who had no leadership experiences had lower scores. Also, those students with three or more leadership positions scored higher in the majority of the practices when compared to students with only one leadership experience. For instance, a comparison of one leadership experience with 4 or more experiences yielded the following results (scores possible range from 6 to 30): Model the Way (22.14 to 24.09), Inspire a Shared Vision (21.57 to 24.62), Challenge the Process (20.96 to 23.81), Encourage the Heart (23.41 to 25.50). Undergraduate leadership development is enhanced through students working in leadership positions, and further leadership development benefits exist for students who serve in more than one position.

A robust qualitative study that included interviews with 50 student leaders further confirmed the importance of leadership positions on campus for undergraduate leadership development (Sessa, Morgan, Kalenderli, & Hammond, 2014). The study sought to explore the key developmental events in the lives of college students and the leadership lessons they learned within these experiences. The student leader participants were from four different institutions in the mid-Atlantic region and were asked to complete a pre-interview reflection on their top three key events in college that shaped their leadership development. The in-depth interviews and analysis revealed a total of 180 key events, and 734 leadership lessons learned from these events. Participants holding their first leadership position in college accounted for 8.9% of the 180 key events, and the expansion of responsibilities in a position or taking on a higher leadership position accounted for 8.4% of the key events. Both of these key event categories were in the top five among the 13 identified key event categories revealed during data analysis. The lived experiences of these participants affirmed the importance of holding leadership positions on campus and added a nuanced understanding of the relevance of students advancing into leadership roles that include additional responsibilities.

Another quantitative study explored the effect of campus organizational involvement on the leadership behaviors of undergraduates at a large land-grant institution. The population of the study included 3,492 undergraduate students enrolled during fall 2008 in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Florida, and 1,150 responded to the survey (Patterson, 2012). The survey included the S-LPI, and questions pertaining to the types of organizations the participant was involved in as well as the highest leadership position obtained in these organizations. Of the 826 students in an organization outside of the agriculture college, 59.7% were in one organization, 27.4% were in two organizations, 10.5% were in three and

2.4% were in four or more. There were 558 respondents in leadership positions with 62.1% holding one leadership position and 25.4% holding two positions. The respondents scored highest on the practices of Enable Others to Act, Model the Way, and Encourage the Heart (Patterson, 2012). The researchers did not employ a *t*-test or correlation between the leadership behaviors of students in leadership positions and those not in leadership positions. The study simply presented findings from the SLP-I for all respondents and showed that a large majority of these students were heavily involved in student organizations. However, the author did recommend an important area for future studies to explore stating: “Similarly, in terms of institutional learning outcome assessments, one might ponder how much ‘leadership’ this group of students is providing in 5 years, or more, after their graduation in their professions and communities” (Patterson, 2012, p. 8).

Frey’s (2011) work delved deeper into the topic of student leadership positions through an attempt to better understand how the type of leadership experience affected leadership behaviors. The Leadership Biographical Questionnaire (LBQ) was created to reflect 14 different experiences within student leadership positions. These experiential statements loaded onto three thematic factors that were considered the independent variables: experience building relationships outside the organization, experience communicating or dialoguing with membership, and experience activating membership. A sample of 141 student leaders at a liberal arts college in the northeastern United States completed a survey that included the LBQ and the S-LPI as the dependent variable. Thirteen of the 15 associations between the five practices and the three types of leadership experiences had a significant correlation. Two particular leadership experience themes stood out as having influence on every leadership practice; experiences that involved the mobilization of other members to execute events or projects and experiences that

engaged followers in discussions through meetings that led to decision making. Leadership behaviors are enhanced through student leadership positions, and specific experiences may provide additional leadership development benefits.

Foreman and Retallick (2013) provided more evidence for the relationships between extracurricular involvement and leadership outcomes through utilizing portions of the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS) rather than the S-LPI. The study sampled all of the 969 full-time senior college students at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University, which resulted in 199 completed responses. The survey included questions that pinpointed the type of extracurricular activities and their amount of involvement. The researchers used the individual values construct portion of the SRLS along with its three subscales including Consciousness of Self, Congruence, and Commitment. The number of clubs/organizations was put into four categories (0, 1-2, 3-4, 5-11), and an ANOVA was utilized with number of clubs as the independent variable and the individual values and subscales as the dependent variable. A *t*-test was used to explore the relationship between organizational leadership positions with individual values and subscales. Finally, the researcher developed an involvement index that included how long the student was involved in a particular activity, number of organizations and the highest level of leadership reached. An analysis of variance tests was used with the involvement index as the independent variable and individual values and subscales as the dependent variable.

The results showed the importance of extracurricular involvement in general and additional evidence for the positive relationship between student leadership positions and leadership outcomes for undergraduates (Foreman & Retallick, 2013). First, there was a significant difference at the .05 level between students who were members of clubs and non-club

members for Congruence, Commitment, and Individual Values. The ANOVA revealed significant relationship between number of organizations and the leadership outcomes. Furthermore, students who served in leadership roles within organizations scored significantly higher on Consciousness of Self, Commitment, and Individual Values. Generally, the higher involvement index score resulted in higher scores for all leadership outcomes measured. Quantitative evidence using both the SRLS and the S-LPI seems to support the importance of campus involvement and student leadership positions on undergraduate leadership development.

Moreover, qualitative explorations also lead to similar conclusions about campus involvement and leadership development. In an undergraduate leadership course, 107 students from a large land grant institution responded to an end-of-course reflective prompt about their changes in leadership behaviors revealed through the S-LPI taken before and after the course (Burbank et al., 2015). A qualitative content analysis was utilized and data were analyzed through an ethnographic analysis approach. One of the major emergent themes showed that participation in extracurricular activities such as student organizations led to positive changes in leadership behaviors. This theme was expressed through the following respondent quotation: “I have taken on more leadership roles in organizations I’m in... I believe I set the bar by being an example for members” (Burbank et al., 2015, p. 190). The link between leadership development and campus involvement is further strengthened as this open-ended prompt pointed to the importance of these experiences.

Another qualitative study has provided a rich description of student leader’s experiences and leadership growth. Bond and Sterrett (2014) surveyed and then conducted a one-hour semi-structured interview with 21 college students at 11 different institutions who served as officers in the same honorary professional organization focused on education. These student leadership

positions with Kappa Delta Pi (KDP) involved working with faculty advisors to bring in new members, creating professional development activities for members, and executing service projects. The qualitative data from surveys and interviews were transcribed, coded, and developed into emergent themes. Participants were able to describe 18 different learned leadership skills. Communication was the leadership skill most frequently cited and others included: planning, listening, honoring commitments, adaptability and multi-tasking. The most common benefit of serving in the position was increased confidence as a leader along with secondary benefits of learning to work in teams and learned transferable professional skills. Interestingly, faculty advisors were the greatest source of leadership development, which is consistent with Dugan and Komives (2007) findings from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) that faculty mentors were a top predictor of almost all SCM values.

### **Campus Mentors**

The type of mentor and the purpose of the mentoring also affects the leadership development of college students. Another study utilizing data from the MSL explored further to better understand this variable. A final sample of 36,197 participants from the MSL were used that indicated having a significant mentor in college (Campbell et al., 2012). The mentor component included three independent variables including mentor type (faculty, staff, employer, and peer), mentoring focused on personal development, and mentoring based on leadership empowerment. The typical MSL dependent variables of the eight SCM leadership values were utilized including: Consciousness of Self, Congruence, Commitment, Collaboration, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility, Citizenship and Change. These eight parts produced a final compiled index score. Control variables included the type of institution, race, gender, leadership

experiences prior to college, class year, and transfer status. Data analysis included the Hierarchical Ordinary Least Squares regression.

The control variables explained a significant amount of variance (38%) in socially responsible leadership capacity, which included the index score of all eight SCM leadership values (Campbell et al., 2012). After including the independent variables (mentor type, mentor for personal development, and mentor for leadership empowerment) with the control variables, this second model explained 46% of the variance. The three mentorship variables together explained 8% of the variance. This result revealed that mentorship when isolated from other variables does have an impact on the leadership capacity of students. The student affairs mentor was positively related in socially responsible leadership capacity in favor of the student affairs mentor. Being mentored by a faculty member was not significantly different than peer or employer mentorship. The student affairs mentor had the most impact on socially responsible leadership. Mentoring for leadership empowerment and mentoring for personal development were both positively related to the leadership outcomes. The authors concluded that both mentor type and the mentoring approach were important to leadership development.

The current research does not fully explore mentorship, but the literature does clearly show that it is an important variable in the leadership development of undergraduates (Bond & Sterrett, 2014; Campbell et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives 2007, 2010). However, this understanding does not necessarily align with leadership education practice. A mixed-method study was conducted to systematically review non-credit undergraduate leadership centers to explore the scope of these centers, and the connection between leadership education research and practice (Lunsford & Brown, 2017). The procedures included quantitative data collected through surveys sent to directors of leadership centers and qualitative coding of center websites. A

concurrent design was used as data were collected simultaneously. Sampling was done by identifying the top public and private schools in each state through faculty salaries as the primary indicator. This initial method yielded 111 institutions, of which 69 were identified as having a not-for-credit leadership center. All 69 center websites were coded and 35 responses from center directors were collected from the electronic survey. Roughly half of the centers responding to the survey reported that they do not ever use mentoring or coaching. Only one leadership center website cited mentoring. It appears that the inclusion of mentoring is a commonly missed opportunity in undergraduate leadership education.

### **Undergraduate Leadership Programming**

As previously evidenced by Dugan and Komives' (2007) extensive study, collegiate leadership programming does contribute to leadership development. Although becoming outdated, Posner's (2009) longitudinal study of leadership programming for business students is of particular importance due to the limited number of studies that included a quasi-experimental design in this area. The S-LPI was initially given to all 384 first-year students majoring in business at a private West Coast institution prior to receiving any leadership training. Participants were then exposed to a leadership seminar spanning two quarters that covered: exploring leadership, the impact of leaders, and developing leadership skills. These students were then administered the S-LPI again as seniors, which resulted in 169 matched respondents. At this time, the quality of the study was further enhanced by giving the S-LPI to 212 non-business seniors for comparison purposes.

A *t*-test analysis revealed that the seniors majoring in business reported significant increases in the frequency of using all five leadership practices when compared to their freshman year (Posner, 2009). The increases included (scores possible range from 6 to 30): Model the

Way from 20.68 to 21.83, Inspiring a Shared Vision from 20.64 to 22.57, Challenge the Process from 23.96 to 25.36, Enable Others to Act from 23.02 to 24.79, and Encourage the Heart from 23.57 to 24.59. Furthermore, the comparison of the business major seniors (treatment group), and non-business major seniors showed that the treatment group had significantly higher usage of four leadership practices including: Inspire a Shared Vision (22.10 versus 22.81), Challenge the Process (23.41 versus 25.29), Enable others to Act (24.07 versus 24.52) and Encourage the Heart (23.55 versus 24.55; Posner, 2009). These findings provide promising evidence for the effectiveness of leadership programming in developing the leadership capacity of college students.

However, not every leadership program has shown significant student gains in the usage of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. An S-LPI pre-test and post-test of 18 undergraduate students completing a nine-month leadership development program designed for pre-health professionals revealed limited leadership behavior gains (McKinney & Waite, 2016). This study utilized a pair-sampled *t*-test and also included an observer S-LPI along with the participant S-LPI given both before and after the program. There were no significant changes at the  $p < .05$  level for each of the five practices for both observer and participant scores. This unexpected finding could be linked to either the quality of the leadership training or the short time period between the assessments. Although, some evidence exists to support the possibility of leadership gains occurring over short time periods.

Short-term leadership programming for undergraduates has been shown to have staying effects of leadership development. One study assessed the leadership gains of a short-term leadership program delivered by a leadership center at a large public institution (Rosch & Caza, 2012). The five different leadership development offerings included approximately eight hours

of content available to all students and were consistent with the SCM. The sample included 612 students that participated in either one program ( $n = 583$ ) or two programs ( $n = 29$ ). Three different groupings of students completed the survey. Group one completed the survey prior to the leadership program ( $n = 194$ ; 51% response rate), group two completed the survey immediately following the program ( $n = 219$ ; 31%), and group three completed the survey three months after the program. This design led to between-person comparisons rather than a pre-test and post-test individual person comparison. Data were collected over a three-year period to ensure all five leadership program offerings were equally represented. The instrument utilized was the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS) for the comparison of leadership capacities, and data analysis was done using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) while using maximum likelihood estimation structural equation models.

The findings revealed that the students who took the assessment immediately following the training (group two) scored significantly higher on Commitment, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility, and Citizenship when compared with the group that took the assessment prior to training (group one). A comparison of group three (3 months after training), and group two showed no significant differences between the SCM values measured. This result indicated that the short-term leadership training had a lasting effect, as the gains in leadership capacity persisted three months after the leadership programming. This study showed that short-term leadership programming can contribute to meaningful leadership development of undergraduates, but future studies could include an exploration of the enduring effects well beyond three months and even beyond graduation into the professional environment.

Undergraduate student voices also spoke to the importance of formal leadership programming through the previously described research that included interviews with 50 student

leaders from four different institutions (Sessa et al., 2014). In this study participants were asked to reflect on three to five key events in college that had shaped them as a leader. Of the 180 total key events coded through data analysis, 10.1% were in the event category for leadership development program or coursework. This was the second most frequently stated event category of the 13 identified categories. The authors posited, “Student leaders need to also engage in activities that allow them to formally learn leadership theories and practice through curricular and formal programs...” (Sessa et al., 2014, p. 20) and that perhaps doing action alone may not be sufficient for undergraduate leadership development

A program assessment of a student leadership program designed for pharmacy students further displayed the value of formal leadership training for undergraduates (Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013). The Student Leadership Development Series at Drake University included five primary focuses: understanding personal leadership style; solving problems and networking through collaboration; building relationships; evaluating ability to mentor others; and practicing leadership skills. Many of the program activities explicitly incorporated The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). Participants attended one hour of small group activities and one hour of listening to a guest speaker each month for one academic year. Students were also given the opportunity to work in groups on a poster competition that explored a chosen leadership topic. Students who were the most active participants were granted travel funds to attend conferences to further develop their leadership skills the following year. Finally, students typed a summative paper explaining their personal leadership philosophy as well as how they plan to continue developing as a leader.

The program assessment included 159 students who participated between 2007 and 2013 (Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013). Data were collected through reflective worksheets completed

by each student, through written reflections after travel, poster presentations, leadership philosophy paper, and an end-of-the-program evaluation administered to participants.

Participants reported an increased aspiration to hold leadership positions and felt better prepared for these positions. Participants indicated that they had learned about leadership and were able to connect their learning back to specific program components. Students stated they had new awareness of Model the Way and Enable Others to Act, which contributed to their capacity to serve as mentors to members of organizations they were involved with. Student reflections revealed that they had gained insight on their personal values and leadership style. The assessment concluded that the program was successful in its purpose of assisting students in their personal leadership development, and participants were better equipped as future leaders. Further exploration is warranted, as most leadership programming only includes assessment involving current students rather than program alumni.

### **Employment in College**

Working in college also has an impact on the leadership development of college students, but not all work experiences are equivalent. The location of work (on or off campus), the hours involved, at work mentoring, and the trainings offered all seem to be important factors. The most comprehensive review of this variable used data from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, which was intended to examine the effects of a liberal arts education on the cognitive and personal outcomes of students (Salisbury, Pascarella, Padgett & Blaich, 2012). Initial data were collected through an extensive survey in fall 2006 and included 4,501 students across the 19 liberal arts institutions. The post-test at the end of spring 2007 included 3,081 students, and participants were paid \$50 each time due to the 90-minute length of the survey.

Leadership capacity was assessed through the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS2), and the independent variables related to employment were taken from items on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as a part of the follow up data collection. Rather than report on all eight leadership outcomes from the SRLS2, the researchers clustered them into four domains that are consistent with the Social Change Model. These domains included: Group Values (Collaboration, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility), Individual Values (Consciousness of Self, Congruence, Commitment), Community Values (Citizenship), and Change. The following work categories were produced from the survey: Did not work on campus ( $n = 2117$ ), did not work off campus ( $n = 2107$ ), worked on campus 1-10 hours ( $n = 530$ ), worked on campus more than 10 hours per week ( $n = 283$ ), worked off campus 1-10 hours/week ( $n = 271$ ), worked off campus 11-20 hours/week ( $n = 266$ ), and worked off campus more than 20 hours/week ( $n = 287$ ). The researchers introduced the following control variables: precollege measures, SAT/ACT/COMPASS equivalent scores, sex, race, precollege employment, and institutional type (Salisbury et al., 2012).

Data analysis used a specific regression option found in STATA software that adjusted to avoid type I errors. Each of the leadership domains were regressed on the employment measures, precollege measures, and institutional type. The analysis revealed that working 10 hours or less per week had no impact on leadership capacities (either on or off campus). Off-campus work appeared to be more meaningful, as 11-20 hours per week had a positive impact on overall leadership score and individual leadership score. Additionally, working off campus more than 20 hours per week showed an even greater impact on overall leadership score, individual leadership score, and group leadership score. Working on-campus more than 10 hours per week only affected the Leadership for Change Score (Salisbury et al., 2012). These findings were

consistent with Burbank et al. that was previously covered in this review (2015). Students responding to a reflective prompt on their S-LPI gains, stated that extracurricular activities, including work, increased their usage of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. Working while in college does appear to have an impact on the leadership development of undergraduates.

Furthermore, leadership capacity gains can be enhanced within these work experiences when intentional training is included, as one study showed that an outdoor recreation training trip contributed to the leadership identity of student employees (Boettcher & Gansemer-Topf, 2015). The five-day kayaking training trip was intended to prepare student employees to lead future trips independently. Interviews, field notes, observations and journals revealed that the 11 participants could articulate learned leadership that placed them in the last three stages of the leadership identity theory as developed by Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005). These six stages included: Awareness, Exploration/Engagement, Leader Identified, Leadership Differentiated, Generativity, and Integration/Syntheses. Verbalizing elements of the Leadership Differentiated, participants understood importance of communication through active listening and empathy, while also comprehending that leadership can occur both with and without a title. The student employees stated that they activated leadership skills of planning, organization, adaptability, and empowering others with the understanding that these skills should be used to serve others and the recreation department. This greater good understanding typified the Generativity stage. Finally, students displayed Integration/Synthesis by applying their leadership identity or leadership learning to other contexts including teams, others, and their community. Intentional training in a student employee setting can lead to improved leadership outcomes for undergraduates.

Another study involving a campus recreation department had mixed results in terms of leadership outcomes produced from a student employee leadership training experience. This quasi-experimental, quantitative study was intended to assess the quality of a leadership training program designed for undergraduates who were employed by a campus recreation department (Tingle, Cooney, Asbury, & Tate, 2013). Kouzes and Posner designed the Student Leadership Retreat and Training program (SLRT), specifically for a liberal arts college found in the southwestern United States. The yearlong program put students into three classifications that formed small teams. The classifications included: mentor (one per team), midlevel supervisor (two or three per team), and new hires (two or three). Mentors received full comprehensive leadership training (full treatment), midlevel supervisors received some training (partial treatment), and new hires received no leadership training (control group). A pre-test of the S-LPI was given before campus training began in the fall, and the post-test of the same instrument was given at the end of the spring semester. Of the participants, 51 completed both phases of data collection and data were collected in two separate years but included different participants each year to increase the sample size. Paired sample *t*-tests were employed to compare pre-test and post-test without considering group assignments. Next, a *k*-group multivariate analysis of variance was conducted on the five leadership practices with the independent variable set as the treatment group (full, partial, control).

The *t*-tests comparisons, not considering group differences, showed statistical significance for Inspire a Shared Vision from pre-test to post-test for all student employees (Pre-test:  $M = 20.39$ ,  $SD = 3.86$ ; Post-test:  $M = 21.76$ ,  $SD = 3.48$ ). The other four practices did not have significant mean differences (Tingle et al, 2013). When comparing the three groups, simple observation revealed that the full treatment group did score higher than the other two groups

(partial/control) on all five practices. The students' leadership group had significant effect on Encourage the Heart, and came close to significance for Enable Others to Act. A Tukey HSD post hoc test showed that the full treatment group had higher changes in Enable others to Act that was significant when compared to the partial treatment group. Finally, Encourage the Heart also showed that the full treatment group had higher changes of significance than did the partial treatment group and control group. No significant changes were found for the other three practices. Even though the treatment only had significant influence on two leadership practices, this study does provide additional support for the potential impact of student-employee training on leadership development.

### **Service and Service-Learning**

Additional evidence does exist for Dugan and Komives' (2010) findings on the MSL that community service was a significant predictor on six of eight SCM leadership values with the exception of Consciousness of Self and Change. One phenomenological, qualitative study explored how leadership developed through a Social Change Model (SCM) lens after an intense service project following a natural disaster (Buschlen & Warner, 2014). The sample included five undergraduates and a faculty advisor who served by repairing homes for low income families for six days following a tornado in Virginia. The six participants kept journals that included SCM prompts, and entries were made prior to, during, and thirty days after the trip. Photos, videos and community documents from the disaster site were also coded. The findings were broken into the SCM framework of Individual Values, Group Values, and Community Values.

In the domain of Individual Values, the participants expressed alignment between actions and beliefs (Buschlen & Warner, 2014). They reflected on their desire to serve and help the

families they interacted with. The students explored their preconceived notions, understood they were helping severely impacted families, and felt privileged to work on their homes. The participants stated that the group became cohesive and understood that the project was a group effort (Group Values). They further expressed comprehension that they were one small piece of a bigger service project involving other like-minded groups (Community Values). Finally, the participants displayed transformational learning through the meaningful comprehension of the effects of serving others. Service is consistently tied to the leadership development of undergraduates, and additional evidence exists in the context of service-learning courses (Burbank et al., 2015; Foli et al., 2014).

The connection of leadership development and service-learning was explored in a quantitative study that determined if leadership behaviors of nursing students changed after a service-learning experience (Foli et al., 2014). Participants included 65 senior students in a management course who had to execute a public health fair as a part of the course, while working in smaller groups for certain responsibilities. Students completed the S-LPI-Self before and after the service experience, and the S-LPI-Observer was used to evaluate peers. The post-test also included six service-learning items that were compiled into a single index. An ANOVA showed that students had significant gains in each of the five practices on the SLP-I-Self post-test. Enable Others to Act had the highest change from 24.55 to 26.13, and all five practices increased after the service experience. Finally, the SLP-I-Self and SLPI-Observer scores had significant positive correlations, which added additional validity to the study. These findings were consistent with results in a study previously covered in this review (Burbank et al., 2015).

On an end-of-course reflection on personal changes in S-LPI scores, students reflected that their leadership behaviors had changed due to the student-developed, service-learning

projects found in the course (Burbank et al., 2015). For example a student stated, “I was able to focus my actions on Challenging the Process this semester by my service-learning growth project that I chose...” (Burbank et al., 2015, p. 189). Another student typified Inspire a Shared vision: “with my service learning project I tried to inspire the kids to work hard and have fun in everything they do for their community” (Burbank et al., 2015, p. 189). The qualitative and quantitative evidence taken together provide strong support for the importance of service in leadership development.

### **Academic Majors**

Although the effects of students’ academic majors have not been fully explored, there is some evidence that suggests this variable may influence leadership outcomes (Posner et al., 2015; Rosch, 2013). Leadership development can occur on college campuses as was shown through the analysis of a longitudinal study at a Canadian university involving 2,855 students who took the S-LPI at entry, year one, and year three (Posner et al., 2015). Interestingly, students’ programs of study led to a variety of leadership development patterns suggesting that a student’s major may have some bearing on leadership development. The study compared the leadership changes in students in five different colleges: Arts, Science, Engineering, Business, Education, and Nursing and Kinesiology. No patterns of S-LPI changes, or leadership development were identical across the colleges. Engineering students had lower scores entering than any other group but showed gains for every leadership practice after the first year. Business students experienced losses in four of five practices in this first year, and no other colleges’ students had gains in all five practices the first year. The authors suggested that engineering students may have experienced unique changes in leadership behaviors due to bonding from rigors of engineering coursework and the extensive group work found in the first year. The

varying experiences found in each academic program may have bearing on undergraduate leadership development.

Another study focusing specifically on students studying agriculture speaks to the potential differences in student experiences across academic majors. The study explored the differences of campus involvement and leadership capacities between students majoring in agriculture and a non-agriculture comparison group (Rosch, 2013). Utilizing data from the MSL, the researchers compared 461 students that identified themselves as studying agriculture with other non-agriculture majors. To have a similar comparison group, the researcher did a simple random sample of the remaining non-agriculture respondents. A chi-square analysis was conducted to compare demographics of the two groups, and size of effect was measured using Cramer's phi. Also, *t*-tests were conducted to compare the two groups. Oddly, the agriculture students had lower leadership capacity outcomes but had higher levels of campus involvement (Rosch, 2013). Agriculture students were more involved in student organizations with a small effect size. Agriculture students had more leadership positions on campus, with a small effect size. They participated in leadership training at a similar rate to non-agriculture students. Agriculture students had lower leadership capacity on the SRLS instrument and did not differ on the instrument for leadership efficacy. Agriculture students had lower outcomes for cognitive complexity and socio-cultural discussions.

Counter to much of the literature, students with more leadership positions and more campus involvement had lower leadership capacity outcomes. The authors suggested that the lower outcomes on cognitive complexity and socio-cultural discussions for agriculture students may have accounted for this unusual finding. It was clear from this study that agriculture students seemed to have a different campus experience from non-agriculture majors as evidenced

by more campus involvement and less engagement in socio-cultural discussions. These variables have been tied to leadership outcomes, therefore, a student's academic major may have an impact on their leadership development.

### **Pedagogy in Leadership Education**

This section will explore pedagogy within leadership classroom settings as well as factors involved in the delivery of leadership programming. An examination of Eich's (2008) landmark study of high-quality leadership programs, and Jenkins' (2013) review of instructional strategies provide the initial framework for this section. This review pointed to the following practices that add value to leadership education: reflection, action-oriented or experiential components, values clarification, strengths awareness, classroom dynamics and additional attributes of high-quality leadership programs.

Utilizing a multi-case design, Eich (2008) explored attributes in leadership programming that lead to significant learning and leadership development through an application of grounded theory. Purposeful sampling was used to include four different undergraduate leadership programs in the form of a leadership course, a leadership retreat, a leadership program rooted in service, and a co-curricular program. These programs met six specific criteria: assessment data of program revealed significant learning and development, five-year history, at least 15 people available to interview from different stakeholder perspectives, nationally recognized, leadership taught as collaborative, at least a semester length equivalent, and programs had differing methods. One-hour interviews were conducted with 62 stakeholders, such as students, alumni, student staff, teachers and administration, and the constant comparative method was used to analyze data. The major findings included 16 program attributes which contributed to student learning and leadership development that were organized into three clusters: building and

sustaining learning community, experiential learning focused on students, and program continues to develop and is rooted in research.

The first cluster, pertaining to the learning community, revealed that students help each other develop as leaders (Eich, 2008). High-quality programs included engaged students from diverse backgrounds in communities that challenge each other but also support each other. The programs included experienced, student-centered educators that practice leadership themselves in front of students. There were structures that facilitated one-on-one conversations, and educators were accessible. Finally, smaller groups within programs were formed for learning and community building purposes.

The second cluster tied to high-quality leadership programs focused on experiential learning (Eich, 2008). Students were afforded the opportunity to apply leadership learning through group work on class projects, community service, and leadership retreat experiences. Students were permitted to reflect on leadership learning and make connections to experiences. Reflection activities included journals, quiet pondering of questions, and reflective dialogue. Additional reflection occurred in the form of individually developed leadership plans. Self-assessment tools for personality, strengths, and values were applied and understood in program meetings. Finally, students faced challenging moments and people that were different from themselves.

The final cluster showed that high-quality programs were rooted in research, and the programs continued to develop (Eich, 2008). Clearly expressed programmatic values were incorporated that often focused on the socially just purpose of leadership or using leadership for good. Furthermore, the mission and values were displayed in the actions of the programs participants. High-quality programs also have some flexibility that allow students to choose

areas of interest or focus. Finally, the programs sought to continually improve through feedback assessments and the application of research.

Jenkins (2013) provided a broad scope of leadership classroom pedagogy through an examination of current practice in the field. The study explored how frequently leadership educators, who teach credit-bearing leadership courses, engaged in particular pedagogical practices. The sampling of leadership educators included all contacts from the directories of the following professional organizations: Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education, Student Leadership Programs group, and the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs. A second phase of sampling included a random sample of instructors taken from the International Leadership Association Directory of Leadership Programs. The survey, which received 303 responses, included a scale for how frequently the instructor engaged in 24 teaching techniques identified in the leadership education literature. The scale of usage went from never (0% of my class sessions) to 5 Always (91-100% of my class sessions). Another survey question asked for three of the 24 strategies the teacher used the most.

Class discussions in various formats was the most prevalent teaching strategy, while skill-building strategies such as role-play, games and simulations were used far less (Jenkins, 2013). The top 10 practices identified by the percentage of educators who used them in at least 66-100% of class sessions included: class discussions (91.1% of educators used in 66-100% of class sessions), interactive lecture and discussion (66.7%), small group discussions (51.8%), group projects/presentations (43.6%), research projects/presentations (42.5%), reflective journals (37.6%), team building (30%), self-assessments and instruments (28.4%), individual leadership plans (26.7%), and media clips (23.4%). Comparatively, 10.2% used role play activities, 12.9% used games, and 13.2% used simulation 66-100% of the time during class. Finally, the following

10 strategies were the highest ranked in terms of the percentage of leadership educators that identified them as a top three practice found in their course: class discussions (54.5% educators identified as a top three practice), interactive lecture and discussion (47.2%), group projects/presentations (28.7%), self-assessments and instruments (23.8%), small group discussions (23.8%), reflective journals (21.1%), case studies (11.2%), service learning (11.2%), research projects/presentations (10.9%), and media clips (8.6%). This study provided a useful overview of the instructional strategies currently found in the literature and employed by leadership educators.

### **Reflection**

Reflection in groups and individual reflection is an important teaching method that can enhance the leadership learning of undergraduates. White and Guthrie (2016) interviewed and analyzed 391 journal entries of 14 students who had completed some leadership courses within a leadership certificate program. They found among other important attributes that reflective instructors, a reflective culture, and discussion-based courses enhanced leadership learning. The authors further suggested that leadership educators should communicate the significance of reflection by prioritizing its usage during class time and by engaging in authentic personal reflection as an educator. In another study, similar findings regarding group reflections were identified when exploring students' perceptions of effective pedagogy (Odom, 2015).

In a short-term semester leadership course, 28 students responded in writing to reflection questions given at the end of the course (Odom, 2015). The course instruction included the following elements: lecture, field trips, presentation, discussions in small groups, reflection, full class discussions, and reading of current events. The study focused on the perceptions of the effectiveness of pedagogy and perceptions of the learning environment within the context of the

pedagogy being utilized. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. The findings concluded that 26 of 28 students referred to group discussion in class positively, and 14 students directly stated the class was effective for leadership learning because of the discussions. The discussions led to open-mindedness on different perspectives, and students stated that the practice challenged their own thinking. This emphasis on discussions found during data analysis occurred without this pedagogy being mentioned in the end-of-course reflective prompt. An additional theme was that the students learned more by listening to their peers. This study provided evidence that class discussions is an important, reflective teaching method that increases leadership learning.

Additionally, a qualitative study involving a unique leadership course at The University of San Diego revealed reflection as an important learning tool both collectively and individually (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013). The course focused on adaptive leadership and utilized case-in-point, action-inquiry, and problem-based learning. The course was especially unique as the instructor provided the course description, outcomes, and a few assignments, but the rest of the learning and assessment was determined by the students. Purposeful sampling was used, as a total of 28 students from three sections from 2008 to 2010 were participants for the study. Data were collected through the final course reflection papers that directed students to reflect on learning in the course with attention to themselves, the process of the group, and leadership. Continuous comparison was employed to improve validity and reliability.

Students perceived three experiences were important to their learning process in the course including reflection, engaging in the group process, and feedback (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013). Reflection included an intrapersonal component of self-reflection and an interpersonal component as a collective activity involving discussion. Reflection allowed

students to make sense of their learning and to understand themselves in the context of the course experience. One student stated: “I have developed a newfound understanding for reflection. I believe reflection is one of the most important parts of the learning process...Reflection can help formulate meanings that change, mold, or shift my behaviors” (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013, p. 99). The studies found in this section of the review support Eich’s (2008) conclusion that reflection activities was one of the attributes found in a high-quality leadership program, and help explain why Jenkins (2013) found that discussions and reflective journals were among the top 10 instructional practices of leadership educators.

### **Strengths Awareness**

One study has pointed to the importance of including strengths awareness in leadership education for the purpose of increasing students’ leadership efficacy. All first-year undergraduates at a single institution were invited to participate in a survey that assessed strengths awareness, participation in strengths initiatives, and included the Strengths Awareness scale (Soria et al., 2015). The institution had all first-year students take the Clifton Strengths Finder assessment and engage in related programming. At the end of the first year, students were sent another survey, Student Experience in the Research University (SERU), which included a perceived leadership development outcome. In the first-year population, 14.5% completed both surveys ( $n = 779$ ). The first phase of data analysis included a factor analysis involving 27 items, which would become the independent and dependent variables. Six factors were identified and these variables included strengths awareness, academic engagement, sense of belonging, leadership skills, campus involvement, and classmate interactions. Next, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to examine variance. Structure coefficients

were calculated to determine the magnitude of the bivariate correlation of independent variables and the y variable used for prediction.

The researchers developed four blocks for regression purposes. Block one included demographic data such as first generation, race, Pell-grant status, and residency. Block two included students' pre-test on leadership skills (Soria et al., 2015). Block three included grade point average (GPA), on campus housing, enrollment in first-year seminar, academic engagement, sense of belonging, classmate interactions, and involvement on campus. Block four included the Strengths Awareness Measure. Strengths awareness explained a significant amount of variance in perceived leadership development of first year students' after controlling for the variance from the first three blocks created by the researchers. Pre-college leadership skills was the strongest predictor in the model with the next best predictor being strengths awareness. Although more research is needed, this study provides support for the use of strengths awareness in leadership education.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Limited research exists focused on the usage of emotional intelligence (EI) in the leadership development of undergraduate students, but two such studies were found within the field of outdoor leadership education (Hayashi & Ewert, 2013; Schwartz & Belknap, 2017). A mixed-methods study included a treatment group of 72 college-aged participants who engaged in various 21 to 35-day wilderness expedition trips that included intentional leadership curriculum (Hayashi & Ewert, 2013). A pre and post-test that included the Emotional Quotient Inventory: Short (EQi:S) was given to both the treatment group and a comparison group of 38 undergraduates that did not participate in the outdoor trips. The treatment group took additional post-test assessments including the Emotional Intelligence Experience Questionnaire to explore

what experiences contributed to EI development and the Outdoor Leader Experience Use History to determine prior exposure to outdoor experiences. Finally, interviews were conducted with seven participants from the treatment group to further explore their perceptions of what outdoor experiences were connected with their EI and leadership development.

The results from the multivariate test conducted during data analysis showed that only the treatment group experienced significant increases in the EI score between the pre and post-test. Experiences that included support from peers, practicing leading, and making decisions were particularly important for EI development. Interviews revealed that the experience of being selected as the leader of a day was most important for their development as they had to negotiate conflict, make decisions for the group, and learn from failures.

Another study, that included 317 students participating in one of four different college outdoor orientation programs, provided additional evidence that outdoor education is a valuable tool for EI development (Schwartz & Belknap, 2017). Participants completed the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-short (TEIQue-SF) before and after their engagement in the outdoor orientation experience. The four orientation options included a wilderness backpacking trip, a trip working with Habitat for Humanity with some short hikes, a ropes-course trip with some hiking, and an intensive trip that entailed rock climbing, wilderness backpacking, and white-water rafting. A paired sample *t*-test showed there were significant gains in the total index of the EI scores as measured by the TEIQue-SF. Evidence suggests that outdoor leadership education can be utilized for effective EI development with undergraduates, and more research is warranted to explore how traditional undergraduate leadership programs may contribute to EI gains.

## **Experiential or Action-oriented Components**

Several studies already covered in this review exposed the importance of including experiential attributes in leadership education. The kayaking training trip for student employees of a recreation department, led to 11 participants being able to articulate learned leadership, and a better understanding of their leadership identity (Boettcher & Gansemer-Topf, 2015).

Participants engaged in rebuilding homes following a natural disaster, reflected on learning across the SCM leadership value domains including individual, group, and community values (Buschlen & Warner, 2014). In a nursing management course, students experienced gains in all of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership after having engaged in organizing and executing a public health fair (Foli et al., 2014). Finally, Eich's (2008) review of high-quality leadership programs devoted an entire cluster to experiential learning that included attributes of application in meetings, community service, and retreats.

Vasbinder (2012) explored components of a business program that enhanced leadership development for first-time job seekers. The study revealed that leadership content taught through active exercises resulted in better student recall when compared to passive teaching methods. Another qualitative study of an intensive, one-year leadership development program at a large university in the Northwest confirmed the effectiveness of three leadership teaching tools (Strawn et al., 2017). One of these tools included experiential or action-oriented learning. The leadership development program encouraged students to spend four hours per-week volunteering with off-campus organizations and study participants stated that this action-oriented component contributed to relationship skills, community involvement, and networking. Most studies confirm the usefulness of experiential learning for leadership development, however, some

studies have shown not all experiences lead to leadership gains (Romsa, Romsa, Lim & Wurdinger, 2017; Rosch, 2015).

**Insufficiency of Experience Alone.** Experiential learning attributes do not always lead to the increased leadership capacity of students. One quasi-experimental, quantitative study attempted to understand the influence of service learning on the leadership behaviors of undergraduate students majoring in sport management (Romsa et al., 2017). A pre-test and post-test of the S-LPI was given to four sport management classes, two of which had a service learning activity embedded in the course. Service learning included 70 hours of work inside and outside of the classroom as students planned and executed a service project during one semester. Each of the four courses had 20 to 25 students enrolled and there was a total of 74 participants with 47 receiving the treatment. The findings from the S-LPI were unexpected.

Students who participated in the service learning activity showed a decrease in the frequency of using all five practices including Model the Way, Encourage the Heart, Inspire a Shared Vision, Enable Others to Act, and Challenge the Process (Romsa et al., 2017). The control group experienced an increase in four practices and a decrease in Enable others to Act. The authors proposed several explanations for this unexpected outcome. They noted that students were not given clear leadership roles, and this may have contributed to lower scores. Another suggestion was that the students may have had a more accurate picture of their leadership behaviors after the service learning course. Finally, the authors stated that the course did not include any content on leadership or discussions about leadership. This final suggestion has been supported by additional studies in the literature (Burbank et al., 2015; Facca-Miess, 2015; Rosch, 2015).

One unique quasi-experimental study involved 420 students in a capstone marketing class who were either given or not given formal leadership training alongside an experience-based group project (Facca-Miess, 2015). Those students who received the leadership training had better outcomes on the final project, and group members gave each other better ratings in terms of leadership capability. By comparison, Rosch (2015) assessed the leadership learning of seniors and freshman involved in team projects during separate semester-long engineering courses while receiving no leadership training. The pre-test and post-test was given in complete isolation from any purposeful leadership curriculum. There was no significant increase in the leadership variables assessed for seniors and a moderate increase in the transformational leadership variable for the freshman course.

Finally, a study previously reviewed showed that students responding to an end-of-course reflective prompt on their S-LPI gains, believed that their leadership behaviors increased due to a better understanding of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Burbank et al., 2015). This course content enhanced their learning alongside a student-developed, service-learning project. These three studies point to the importance of including leadership content within experiential attributes. An experience alone is likely insufficient for the leadership development of undergraduates.

### **Classroom Dynamics**

Various classroom dynamics also deserve exploration in leadership education pedagogy. One qualitative study at a large university in the southeast conducted interviews with 15 students who completed or were enrolled in a leadership course to explore how undergraduates clarify their values in a leadership certificate program (Fritz & Guthrie, 2017). A primary theme involving the learning environment revealed the importance of quality faculty, small class size,

and the enrollment of students from multiple disciplines in the process of values clarification. Participants believed that the small class sizes and the permitted one-on-one discussions were important to their learning. Students were able to make connections with each other, and the small class size was valuable for clarifying their values. Diversity in the classroom was important for learning and clarify values, as one student stated, “I think I’ve learned just in life but especially in our leadership classes is that the diversity in opinions and perspectives creates a better final product...” (Fritz & Guthrie, 2017, p. 57). The students also spoke to the importance of a supportive environment, in which differing values were respected. These attributes combined created a learning environment that fostered meaningful discourse.

An additional study confirmed the importance of small classroom sizes. In a short-term leadership course, 28 students responded in writing to end-of-course reflection questions for the purpose of exploring student perceptions of the effectiveness of pedagogy, and perceptions of the learning environment (Odom, 2015). One theme revealed that students believed the small classroom size as well as the physical classroom being small contributed to students bonding in the course. This bonding made learning discussions more fruitful. As an example, one student wrote, “The size of the class and the amount of time we got to spend together made us a tight knit group that was comfortable talking and learning from one another as well as the instructor” (Odom, 2015, p. 24). These findings were congruent with four of Eich’s (2008) attributes of high-quality leadership programs including: diverse students, supportive culture, small groups, and one-on-one relationships. Having a supportive, diverse group, in a small classroom setting has been shown to be advantageous for leadership learning.

### **Transfer of Leadership Behaviors into Work Environments**

Most of the literature surrounding the transfer of leadership learning from a programmatic structure into the work environment involved programs designed for working professionals, and many of these studies were focused in the medical field. After participating in the National Clinic Leadership Development Program in Ireland, 36 participating nurses displayed leadership behaviors and attitudes that could be identified by their managers at work (Patton et al., 2013). Similarly, a survey sent to alumni of a leadership institute for nurses and other health professions revealed that 78% of respondents believed the program had a reoccurring or profound impact on their professional lives (Purdy, 2016).

Continuing in the medical field, one qualitative study evaluated a leadership development program for surgeons through semi-structured interviews with 21 program participants (Pradarelli, Jaffe, Lemak, Mulholland & Dimick, 2016). This exit interview explored three areas: effectiveness of specific program attributes, recommended ways of improving the program, and the impact on their leadership development as surgeons. The program consisted of one full day of training per month for eight months and included debriefing a 360-degree leadership performance feedback assessment with an executive coach. Participants felt empowered in their leadership roles and perceived they had improved team-building abilities. Participants did provide program recommendations including more information on mentoring, conflict resolution, and alumni involvement in future programs. The program impacted the way they approached their day-to-day work and had a general positive impact on their career. Leadership learning from structured programs can add value and learned leadership skills to the work environments of medical professionals.

An additional study showing the effectiveness of leadership programs designed for professionals involved an assessment of a leadership program created for eight county human service organizations, and the study revealed leadership transferability to the workplace (Coloma et al., 2012). The program resulted in increased performance at work, and 50% of the program's graduates indicated they had used 10 of the 15 learned leadership topics. Also, a year after the program 21% stated they had been promoted. Semi-structured interviews with seven program alumni from the Oklahoma Career Tech Women in Leadership Program, showed that some participants experienced promotions after the program and had changes in their perceptions of their effectiveness as leaders at work (Brue & Brue, 2016). Another theme emerged that the program enhanced their professional skills, leadership confidence, careers, and increased their leadership capacity. Leadership learning through a programmatic structure can effectively transfer into professional work environments, but this remains largely unexplored with alumni from undergraduate leadership programs.

### **Alumni Leadership Assessments in Higher Education**

Limited studies exist that explore how undergraduate leadership learning, especially from structured undergraduate leadership programming, transfers into professional work environments. Alumni remain a mostly untapped population for exploring the effectiveness of leadership programming in higher education. Two peer-reviewed publications could be identified that involved leadership and higher education alumni. Neither of these published studies dealt explicitly with alumni from an undergraduate leadership program.

One of these studies sought to understand successful leadership for military doctors and to help explore how the Uniformed Services University (USU) might adjust their curriculum (Dong et al., 2012). The sample included 13 General or Admiral Officers (8 responded) who

were alumni of USU. The survey instrument included two parts: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire-6S (MLQ-6S) which measures transformational leadership and open ended questions pertaining to effective leadership in their position, their leadership preparation experiences, and advice for USU to better prepare military doctors for leadership. Data analysis included calculating transformational leadership scores for each officer from seven factors found in the MLQ-6S and constant comparative method to find common themes. The officers scored high (score of 12-15 considered high) on four areas related to transformational leadership which included: Idealized Influence (score range: 12-14), Inspirational Motivation (score range: 11-15), Intellectual Stimulation (score range: 12-15), and Individualized Consideration (score range: 9-15). All eight participants believed USU prepared them for their leadership position. The participants identified certain experiences at USU that contributed to their leadership development including: Combat Casualty Care Course, Bushmaster, clinical rotations, and mentors (Dong et al., 2012). The participants made the following program recommendations: treating leadership as a core competency, emphasize mentorship or role models, be clear about expectations of leaders, and provide additional training to students. This study did not involve undergraduates but did display that leadership learning in a higher education setting can add value to the professional lives of alumni.

The second publication that explored leadership learning, and higher education alumni is becoming outdated. Nevertheless, it is important to include Kelley (2008) who explored a gap in the literature by conducting a study of 134 former fraternity presidents ten years after their experience in this student leadership position. Almost all indicated that this position had a positive influence on their leadership development, and 80% of the respondents were acting as supervisors at work. This particular study reviewed a specific student leadership positions

experiential impact on the future professional environment. As previously stated, few studies exist that assess the transfer of learned leadership behaviors from an undergraduate leadership program into the work environment.

Although one dissertation could be identified that explored the lived experiences of alumni from an undergraduate leadership program at a liberal arts college (Soesbe, 2012). Purposeful sampling was utilized and resulted in 11 participants from among a pool of 352 in the population of alumni from the College Leadership Program (CLP) at Midwest College. The CLP was guided by a theoretical model of servant leadership and the program included a minor in Leadership Education. The primary data collected involved a phenomenological approach from a series of three semi-structured interviews that included the following topics: life history and context, details of experience in program, and reflection on meaning of their experience. Additional collected data included: data describing the CLP and program alumni feedback previously collected by the institution, document analysis of institutional information, and students' individual leadership portfolios. The three research questions included: "How did alumni construct the meaning of leadership? What meaning did alumni construct? In what ways have alumni applied what was gained within their personal and professional lives" (Soesbe, 2012, p. 197)?

Twelve themes emerged from the data, some of which will be discussed here. Participants became more aware of themselves by learning about their personality, strengths, and behaviors. They learned to apply this self-knowledge, and this gave them more confidence as a leader. Structured collaboration within the program led to participants being able to use knowledge and skills in a collaborative context. Experiential learning such as service-learning, service projects, service trips, and Building Communities Project led to significant leadership

development. Participants frequently mentioned the importance of deep reflection in the program through activities including: reflection with peers, leadership journal, and written papers. These reflective activities enhanced learning found in the experiential attributes in the program. The program alumni also gained knowledge in the following areas: teamwork, diversity, communication, understanding others, transparency, mentoring, and servant leadership. The program was a valuable experience that impacts them today. For instance one student stated, “It’s definitely a fabric of who I am...The CLP has successfully made me who I am today and I consistently look back on that” (Soesbe, 2012, p. 184). Another stated, “The CLP had a tremendous factor in my development as a leader” (Soesbe, 2012, p. 184). Finally, the CLP made them more competitive when seeking employment. This study provided a useful, in-depth narrative of the lived experiences of alumni from a specific undergraduate leadership development program. The study could have been enhanced by including a leadership behaviors instrument, and more research is needed to explore how leadership learning from undergraduate leadership programming is utilized in the work environments of alumni.

### **Leadership Program**

A rich description of the leadership program, under the pseudonym Empower Leaders, reviewed in this study is relevant to the reader to determine potential transferability.

Transformational leadership is a foundational framework for the program, and appendix A provides detailed learning objectives for the program framed around the following four areas: self-leadership, collaboration, community and organizational leadership, and leadership legacy. There are many program requirements (see Appendix B) that students must meet to graduate from the program with a leadership seal on their diploma. A student-affairs unit focused on service and leadership implements the program.

## Leadership Courses

Graduates of the Empower Leaders program completed either three or four non-credit leadership courses depending on when they joined the program. The courses met once-per-week for one hour and fifteen minutes. Students could receive either a grade of satisfactory or unsatisfactory on their transcript, but this did not affect their GPA. Instructors included individuals from the unit implementing the program as well as teaching partners from other student-affairs units that were provided some training. All instructors had to be approved as adjunct faculty by the Provost office to be listed as the instructor of record. Each of the courses utilized the same text entitled *The Student Leadership Challenge: Five Practices for Becoming an Exemplary Leader* (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). Some alumni would have used a previous edition; however, this is negligible as both texts focus on leading students through The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. A description of each course is provided below.

The first course entitled, Self-Leadership, focused on the concept of learning to lead yourself before leading others. The course began with developing a personal definition of leadership and concluded with the creation of a leadership development plan meant to provide actionable guidance on growing as a leader while on campus. A significant portion of the course involved the exploration of personal values and activating values within the practices of Model the Way and Encourage the Heart. Finally, the course also included modules on ethical leadership, personality type, and leadership styles. See Appendix C to review the syllabus and learning objectives for the Self-Leadership course.

The Collaborative Leadership course focused on leading highly effective teams by leveraging the strengths of group members. The course begins with an exploration of group dynamics and the stages groups go through as described by Tuckman (1965). Next, students

discover their individual themes of talent as well as those of classmates by taking the StrengthsQuest assessment, which has recently been retitled to CliftonStrengths for Students. Students learn how they can develop their talent themes into strengths and be more effective by focusing their work in strengths rather than trying to improve areas of personal weakness. Furthermore, students work on a final group project while utilizing their team member's diverse strengths to be a highly effective team. Finally, the course includes the practices of Enable Others to Act and Inspire a Shared Vision. See Appendix D to review the syllabus and learning objectives for the Collaborative Leadership course.

A course entitled, Leading Positive Change, focused on learning to lead positive change within a community or organization. Students explore organizational and community culture as well as the role of power dynamics in leadership. A module covers intent versus impact, and the practice of Challenge the Process is utilized. Finally, students complete a leadership scenario project, in which they describe how they would approach a specific leadership scenario within the organization or community context. See Appendix E to review the syllabus and learning objectives for the Leading Positive Change course.

Finally, the Professional Development Seminar course was added to the program in 2013 and was later removed from the program in fall 2017. It was taken in conjunction with an internship or job and focused on using emotional information effectively in the workplace. Students completed the EQ-I 2.0 assessment to better understand their personal emotional intelligence. The scores were utilized to help students increase their emotional intelligence in areas of development.

### **Additional Program Requirements**

To finish the Empower Leaders program students had to complete multiple additional program requirements (See appendix B). First, students were required to complete and log at least 125 service hours before graduating. The student-affairs unit that implemented the program also coordinated out-of-town service trips, Alternative Breaks, focused on a specific community need. Students in the leadership program were required to serve another community by attending a minimum of one Alternative Break. Attendance at a one-day undergraduate leadership conference on campus was required, and students had to serve at least two semesters in a leadership role that involved educating peers in some capacity. Each academic year students had to attend at least four meetings to show active participation to remain in the program. The purpose and content of these meetings varied and took the form of workshops, service, or social gatherings. One of these social gatherings included an end-of-year celebration that allowed graduating students to showcase their capstone projects.

### **Capstone Project**

The final component of the Empower Leaders program included a capstone project that had to meet three requirements. First, the project had to have an impact in the community. Second, it needed to be sustained beyond their direct involvement. Finally, it had to be feasible within their time frame and available resources. Students were encouraged to work in and build teams that may or may not include other program members.

### **Chapter Summary**

The literature in this chapter reviewed transformational leadership and experiential learning theory as theoretical frameworks, factors that contribute to the leadership development of undergraduates, pedagogy in leadership education, transfer of leadership behaviors into the

work environment, alumni leadership assessments in higher education, and finally a rich description of the leadership program reviewed in this study. The factors related to undergraduate leadership development included: campus involvement, student leadership positions, leadership programming, service and service-learning, employment in college, mentors, and academic major. Effective leadership education pedagogy that was identified included: various classroom dynamics, inclusion of strengths awareness, individual and collective reflection, and experiential or action-oriented learning as well as additional attributes of high-quality leadership programs. Leadership programs developed for working professionals can result in leadership learning transferring into work environments. Finally, very few studies specifically addressed the transfer of leadership learning and behaviors from undergraduate leadership programming into the work environments of alumni.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the research methods used for this study beginning with a restatement of the purpose and research questions previously presented. A justification of the research design is incorporated, as well as a rich description of the population and sample. Next, the chapter includes a review of the leadership behaviors instrument utilized and a brief reflexive narrative of the human researcher as an instrument. The chapter then transitions to an examination of the data collection, analysis, and reporting. Finally, strategies to enhance trustworthiness proceeds the chapter summary.

The purpose of this study was to explore alumni' valuation of an undergraduate leadership program by gaining an understanding of what leadership learning and leadership behaviors have transferred into their work environment. The study included alumni from a large university in the southeastern United States who completed a co-curricular, four-year leadership development program which was given the pseudonym Empower Leaders. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants, and each also completed the Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) to determine the frequency with which they engaged in leadership behaviors while at work. This information was collected in response to the following overarching research question: What is the perceived value of an undergraduate leadership program for alumni in their professional career? To explore this question, the following sub-questions further guided this study: What attributes of the program have the most perceived value for program alumni?; What leadership learning effectively transfers into the work environments of program alumni?; What additional leadership learning would have been beneficial that was not included in the program and how frequently do alumni who completed an undergraduate leadership program engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership? By conducting interviews with program

graduates, the researcher hoped to explore the common lived experiences of program alumni. Additionally, the researcher hoped to understand the program graduates' engagement in transformational leadership through measuring their usage of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2014).

### **Research Design**

As a scholarly practitioner, the researcher sought to explore a problem of practice and as such has assumed a pragmatic worldview. Taking a primary interest in *what works*, pragmatists use various approaches to gain a better understanding of the problem (Creswell 2014; Patton, 1990). "In practice, the individual using this worldview will use multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question..." (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 27). However, this philosophy alone does not provide a complete justification for this study's mixed method approach because, as Creswell (2014) suggested, a reason should be provided for using both quantitative and qualitative data.

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that qualitative research is appropriate when exploration is involved, variables are difficult to measure, and when complex understanding is needed. First, limited research existed that includes alumni from an undergraduate leadership program which led the researcher to utilize the exploratory quality of qualitative data. Second, variables tied to the perceived value of leadership learning can be challenging to quantify or measure. Finally, the research problem requires a complex understanding as the leadership program that was assessed has multiple learning objectives layered across various program components, program alumni work in different fields, and the inherent complexity of attempting to understand how leadership learning transfers to work environments. For these reasons, this study was primarily qualitative in nature.

Soesbe (2012) conducted one of the few studies found in the literature that attempted to understand how alumni have applied learning from an undergraduate leadership program; however, this exploration included only qualitative data. The present study sought to expand this work by adding quantitative data through a leadership behaviors instrument. These additional descriptive statistics were intended to specifically address the fourth research sub-question which informs the overarching inquiry. Creswell (2014) also suggested that having both qualitative and quantitative data will allow for a comparison of conclusions drawn from each.

The specific design for this study was a convergent embedded mixed methods design. This design involved a single data collection phase of both qualitative and quantitative data with priority given to one form of data (Creswell, 2009). Often, the embedded data in these designs seek to address an ancillary or different research question from the primary research question and may have less integration of the two data types (Creswell, 2009; Leavy, 2017). Leavy (2017) noted two embedded data methodologies of which this study was considered quantitative embedded in a primarily qualitative design. This study was primarily guided by a basic qualitative research approach with embedded quantitative data.

Several different qualitative approaches were discarded by the researcher including: ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, case study, and phenomenology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Grounded theory intends to develop theory, and often involves multiple phases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was excluded because developing theory was not the primary intent of this study, but rather the focus was on a problem of practice. Ethnography is concerned with culture or the “beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 29). The population for this study did not have a unifying cultural norm, and exploring culture was not within the scope of this studies

purpose. Narrative inquiries report individual's stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018), but this study was interested in combining the perceived experiences of multiple participants to address the research questions. Finally, phenomenology was excluded as this methodology seeks to understand the meaning or essence of experiences as they are lived (Van Manen, 1990). This study was not concerned with the essence or deeper meaning of leadership, leadership learning or applying leadership learning.

This non-experimental study was primarily basic qualitative research with embedded quantitative data. Basic qualitative research is "probably the most common form of qualitative research found in education" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). This qualitative research approach is concerned with how people understand their experiences, and the meaning they apply to these experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The philosophy of phenomenology undergirds basic qualitative research with its focus on experience and the inclusion of a phenomenon. Phenomenology is distinct from basic qualitative research because it explores the pre-reflective state of the experience to capture the common essence of a phenomenon in the lifeworld (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Van Manen, 1990). This study was less concerned with the essence of a phenomenon but was interested in the constructed meaning of a phenomenon as it is experienced. Participants had experienced the phenomenon of carrying leadership learning from the same undergraduate leadership program into their present work environments. Exploring how the participants have interpreted these experiences, and the meaning they have applied to them was intended to allow the researcher to better understand the perceived value of an undergraduate leadership program. This application of basic qualitative research coupled with embedded quantitative data was utilized to address the research questions.

## **Population, Sample, and Sampling**

Qualitative studies are often less concerned with generalizability, but rather allow the reader or practitioner to determine transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this case the burden is on the individual applying the information to their setting to determine transferability. Yet, this requires the researcher to provide adequate details regarding context and adequate, rich data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This section provides a rich description of the population, sampling method, and the leadership program.

### **Population**

The population for this study included 57 program alumni from a co-curricular undergraduate leadership program at a large university in the southeastern United States. The leadership program is relatively new, and these alumni graduated from the institution between 2012 and 2018. The specific demographics for this population are not known, however, demographic data collected for the program in 2014 that focused on 134 freshmen does provide some relevant information. This 2014 cohort of freshmen students included the following demographics: 59% female, 67% White, 22.8% African-American, and 9.5% that included Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islanders, Asian ethnicities, and multi-racial students (Banter, n.d.).

### **Undergraduate Leadership Program**

A rich description of the program completed by the population is also appropriate for practitioners to determine transferability and much of this description can be found in the previous literature review. The Empower Leaders program is theoretically rooted in transformational leadership and has maintained learning objectives framed around the following areas of focus: self-leadership, collaboration, community and organizational leadership and

leadership legacy. Appendix A provides the detailed learning objectives framed around these four focus areas. Students must meet multiple program requirements (see Appendix B) throughout their undergraduate tenure to graduate from the program with a leadership seal on their diploma. The majority of students do not complete all of the rigorous requirements, and this study is solely focused on the population of alumni who met all of the requirements before graduating from the institution. The program is implemented by a student-affairs unit that is focused on service and leadership.

### **Sampling Method and Sample**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) expressed that there is not an exact number that can be given for the correct sample size in qualitative research but rather “what is needed is an adequate number of participants, sites, or activities to answer the question posed at the beginning of the study” (p. 101). This study sought to include a sample of eight participants as the researcher believed this was sufficient to answer the research questions. Access was obtained through a letter of cooperation from the Vice President of Student Affairs at the institution where the study was conducted, and the Provost’s office granted permission to use email addresses when contacting potential participants. Although new to the position, the primary investigator currently works in the department that coordinates the Empower Leaders program.

Purposeful sampling was utilized, which is typical for qualitative research and involves selecting individuals that can provide relevant data to the phenomenon in question (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Simply stated, this method is interested in selecting “a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). This approach was appropriate as this mixed methods study was primarily driven by qualitative research. Alumni from the Empower Leaders program were purposefully selected because their experiences were relevant to the

phenomenon being explored. A form of purposeful sampling, criterion sampling was also utilized and included selecting individuals based on some met criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Three primary criteria guided the sample selection process. First, participants must have completed all program requirements of the undergraduate leadership program being reviewed. Second, participants must be employed at least part-time for them to have experienced the phenomenon of transferring leadership learning to a current work environment. Finally, participants must have the technological capability to engage in a web-based interview.

In order to determine eligibility, the office that coordinates the program screened all 57 alumni who had completed all components of the Empower Leaders program. This ensured that participants met the previously mentioned criteria and were able to provide the rich data needed to answer the research questions. The researcher then considered additional criteria to select the participants that would result in a diverse sample. In a similar study, Soesbe (2012) included the following factors beyond completing an undergraduate leadership program: gender, race, undergraduate major, graduation date, Grade Point Average (GPA), and degree of success in the leadership program. This study attempted to have a sample that was diverse in graduation date, undergraduate major, gender, and race.

### **Instrumentation**

Quantitative data was collected from participants through the LPI (see Appendix F), which measures the frequency with which individuals engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Posner, 2016). These practices include: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Enable Others to Act, Challenge the Process, and Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). The practices represent a concrete approach to engaging in transformational leadership, and as an extension the LPI can be used to measure this specific leadership approach

(Northouse, 2016). Furthermore, the alumni participants were exposed to these practices within non-credit coursework, as transformational leadership was used as a foundational theory for the program.

The five practices were developed from thousands of case studies and over 500 in-depth interviews on individual's personal best leadership experiences (Posner, 2016). These case studies led to the development of one sentence leadership behavior statements tied to each of the five practices that provide the foundation for the LPI. The LPI was refined through repetitive sessions collecting feedback from respondents and leadership field experts. Both a LPI-Self and LPI-Observer instrument have been developed, which allow for 360-degree feedback. A small effect size below .10 has been shown between respondent category (self or observer), and the five practices scores from the LPI (Posner, 2016). This indicates that the self-reported LPI and observer LPI scores are consistent. Finally, the LPI has shown internal reliability through a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) above .80 for each of the five practices (Posner, 2016).

The LPI contained 30 behavior statements on a 10-point frequency scale, from almost never to almost always, to measure the frequency with which respondents engaged in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). There were six behavior statements tied to each of the five practices, which resulted in a separate index score for each leadership practice. Scoring consisted of adding together the six frequency scores tied to a single practice, which resulted in a maximum score of 60, and a minimum score of six for each practice.

### **Researcher as the Instrument**

Researchers are a human instrument that gather and interpret information during qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Some advantages of the human as instrument

include: the ability to adapt as needed, ability to clarify meaning and summarize, explore unexpected information, and confirm accuracy with participants. However, there are some disadvantages including potential subjective biases as well as the theoretical lens through which the researcher interprets the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In “good” qualitative research, Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the researcher writes about their personal experiences and how these may shape every component of the research (p. 47). In short, “it is important for the researchers to deal with their own potential influences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 17).

The researcher is an undergraduate leadership educator situated in student-affairs, and as a practitioner has taken a specific interest in improving leadership programming for undergraduates. The researcher never participated in an undergraduate leadership program but is currently enrolled in an educational doctoral program that has some leadership preparation components. This is perhaps the area where he parallels the participants the most having experienced the phenomenon of bringing leadership learning from a doctoral program into his work environment. The researcher can recall transferring specific leadership learning from the doctoral program to work and believes in the value of leadership development due to his personal experiences. Moustakas (1994) posited the importance of the researcher bracketing his or her experiences, which entails describing and setting aside personal experiences with the phenomenon. This can be difficult to perfectly achieve and is typically associated with phenomenological research, yet the researcher here attempted to bracket his experiences before entering the participants’ experiences with the phenomenon.

It is also important to note that the researcher conducted this study with alumni from the undergraduate leadership program he currently works to develop. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated multiple potential issues with this type of *backyard* research. One consideration is the

potential imbalance of power between a researcher and participant, which would lead to bad data. For this study, the participants have moved on from the leadership program and are working as professionals in various fields. Because of this the researcher does not maintain a position of power over any of the participants. Another consideration is that it may be risky for the researcher to report unfavorable data and may face employment consequences for doing so (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher for this study did not perceive this type of influence over the research as the institution and student-affairs unit viewed unfavorable data as important information collected for program improvement purposes. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that *backyard* research should be bolstered with validation strategies, which the researcher will address in another section.

Transformational leadership and Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT; Kolb, 1984) were utilized as theoretical frameworks for this study. Elements including the research purpose, questions, the literature review, and these two frameworks guided the data collection, analysis, and reporting. Semi-structured interviews were conducted through the use of an interview protocol (see Appendix G) created by the researcher with these elements in mind. Researchers attend to items related to their theoretical framework, but this also determines "what we do not see, do not ask, and do not attend to" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 88). This is important to note as the researcher was using a particular lens as the human instrument.

**Experiential learning theory.** A further explanation of how ELT was applied as a lens in this study is relevant as the researcher used this theory through a unique approach. It is important to recognize that alumni interviewed for this study have moved through the experiential learning cycle numerous times after graduation in terms of their individual leadership learning. Kolb described this phenomenon stating, "Ideas are not fixed and

immutable elements of thought but are formed and reformed through experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 26). The participants in this study have likely had numerous leadership learning experiences since they completed the program in which they engaged in concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In this study, the researcher attempted to reach back into the memories of participants’ experiences in the program, when they traveled through this cycle to capture these moments of learning. This is wholly consistent with Kolb’s statement that “learning is an emergent process whose outcomes represent only historical record, not knowledge of the future” (Kolb, 1984, p. 26). Within the fluidity of participant’s continued consciousness, the researcher attempted to grab hold of this historical record or leadership learning outcomes from prior programmatic experiences.

This study also explored portions of the participants’ present day experiential learning cycles through the second research question, which focused on what leadership learning from the program effectively transfers into work environments. Through this question, the researcher investigated whether or not participants were still actively experimenting with or applying learning from the program in their current context. Conceptually, the prior learning outcomes generated from learning cycles in the programmatic past were pulled into present day learning cycles. “Knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner” (Kolb, 1984. P. 27). This exploration perhaps enters into a deeper understanding of what it means to be a lifelong learner.

### **Data Collection**

Permission to access participants was obtained through a letter of cooperation with the Vice President of the student-affairs unit that oversees the leadership program that was situated in this study, and the Provost’s office provided permission to specifically use email addresses.

After garnering permission for access to the participants, the researcher used departmental access to the names and email addresses of Empower Leaders alumni who completed all elements of the program. The researcher obtained permission to use the LPI through the online submission of the research request form found within The Leadership Challenge website (Wiley, 2018). The instrument was provided at a discounted rate intended for researchers at \$10 per instrument, and this was paid for using grant funding provided by the Graduate Student Professional Development Fund at Georgia Southern University. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

As previously stated, this study sought to include eight participants. The office that coordinates the Empower Leaders program screened all 57 alumni that completed every element of the leadership program to find those that met the following criteria: employed at least part-time, and having the technological capability to engage in a web-based video interview. This led to the identification of 17 eligible participants, who responded to the screening, being provided to the researcher. The researcher applied additional criteria focused on diversifying these initial 17 that included: graduation date, undergraduate major, gender, and race. These criteria for diversification were similar to that used by Soesbe (2012) which involved graduates from an undergraduate leadership program.

After applying the criteria for diversification, nine alumni were recruited via email with a description of the purpose of the research, the time commitments associated with participation, and an incentive for participation. The incentive included access to individual LPI scores as well as a work book, *The Leadership Challenge Workbook* (Kouzes & Posner, 2017), designed to help leaders enhance their usages of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. The workbooks were paid for by the Graduate Student Professional Development Fund at Georgia

Southern University. These efforts resulted in nine alumni expressing interest in participating in the study.

It is essential in qualitative research to receive written consent from participants, and Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested including the following items: participant's right to withdraw, purpose and procedures, confidentiality protection, known risks, benefits to participant, and signatures. An informed consent letter was provided by the researcher to meet these above criteria. The researcher sent those that expressed interest in participating the letter of informed consent and asked that the letter be signed and returned electronically with the participant's signature. Eight alumni completed the informed consent, and moved forward participating in the study.

Mixed-method researchers using a convergent design must also consider whether or not to use the same individuals for qualitative and quantitative components of the study. It is best to use the same individuals "when the purpose is to corroborate, directly compare, or relate two sets of findings about a topic" (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p. 188). This study sought to corroborate the data to determine the value alumni gained from an undergraduate leadership program in their professional career and will use the same individuals for both data types. These data were collected asynchronously as part of a single phase, but for clarity purposes are described in two stages.

In the first stage of data collection, after informed consent was received, the researcher electronically sent an email link to the participants that included the 30-question LPI to collect quantitative data. The electronic instrument was housed within the online LPI proprietary platform, and the researcher immediately received results once participants completed the

survey. After the completion of all data collection, the researcher shared the personal LPI results with the participant as well as a workbook to assist them in their leadership development.

In the second stage of data collection the researcher worked with the participants to schedule an agreeable time for an interview. Interviews are a common data collection method in basic qualitative research projects, and researchers can choose between standardized, semi-structured, and unstructured interview procedures (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher conducted one semi-structured interview with participants for approximately one hour. A standardized interview was excluded because this rigid format often does not allow an exploration of the interpretation and meaning ascribed to the participant's experiences. Unstructured interviews were also not suitable for this study because the researcher is seeking specific information about a phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews permit a flexible approach in which a list of questions can be addressed, but the researcher can respond differently in the moment to explore new ideas that were not previously considered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prior to the interview, the researcher provided the list of program requirements (Appendix B) completed by the participant to serve as a reflection tool during the interview. Patton (1990) suggested that program materials could be included in interviews "to stimulate recall and reactions" (p. 341). The researcher developed an interview protocol with the following elements as suggested by Creswell (2014): heading, questions, probes, spaces between questions, and concluding thank-you statement (see Appendix G).

Scheduled interviews with participants occurred virtually through a web-based video application that allowed a real-time conversation, as well as recording capability. The advantages of web-based interviews include the researcher no longer being bound by geography when working with participants and reducing research costs related to travel (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). The participants for this study were in various places throughout the United States. The researcher had neither the time nor financial resources available for this study to include face-to-face interviews. WebEx was utilized as the platform to conduct interviews for the following reasons: the researcher was familiar with its function, it was provided by researcher's institution, and it had the ability to record video conversations. The researcher, in case of a failure in video recording technology, used a sensitive, backup recording device.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher used Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral as an overarching guide while integrating specific coding and analysis techniques from Saldaña (2009). The first step in this spiral involved managing and organizing the data. All interviews were transcribed by a transcription service (GMR Transcription) at a rate of \$1.35 per minute, and this was paid for by grant funding through the Graduate Student Professional Development Fund at Georgia Southern University. The transcripts were downloaded by the researcher in Microsoft Word from the transcription service through a password protected login, and transcripts were then edited to protect participant identity. Pseudonyms were given for all potentially identifying information to protect the participant's identity. Transcripts were then imported into NVivo 10 for data analysis. The transcription files were saved with corresponding audio files in a password protected file on the researcher's computer. A file naming system was consistently utilized to ensure organization for easy access.

The next step in the data analysis spiral is reading and memoing emergent ideas. The researcher began data analysis by reading the entirety of each transcript while making notations in the margins on printed copies of each transcript. This also allows researchers to begin formulating potential useful insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Analytic memos were written

in NVivo 10 throughout the coding process as a means to reflect on ideas, code choices, and potential themes. During this first cycle of coding the researcher employed specific coding methods including structural, initial, and evaluation coding (Saldaña, 2009). Structural coding allowed the data to be segmented into topical areas that specifically addressed each research question, and was clumped together for further analysis. Initial coding or open coding allowed for the development of potential codes as concepts were permitted to emerge from the data. At this time the researcher looked for data that were interesting or possibly important to the study while keeping the theoretical frameworks and research questions at the forefront. Evaluation coding was a natural fit for this study as it included assigning judgements to a program, and “explores how the program measures up to a standard or ideal” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 97).

As multiple transcripts were analyzed in the same way, a master list of codes that cut across data were developed in NVivo 10. The codebook included the following details: the code, code definition, and description of when to use the code (Saldaña, 2009). An index of all coded data was also organized in NVivo 10 for analysis purposes. The codebook and index generated from all transcripts assisted in the next phase of the data analysis spiral of describing and classifying codes into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The second cycle method of pattern coding was utilized to group first cycle codes into meta-codes (Saldaña, 2009). These identified pattern codes were used in the development of descriptions of major themes. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested developing five to six themes, and the researcher initially sought to stay within this range.

The quantitative data only included analysis involving descriptive statistics. Every returned LPI was scored to create a score for each of the five practices for every respondent. The scoring, although automated by the proprietary online-platform, was done by adding together the

frequency scale responses from the behavior statements tied to each individual practice. The frequency scale for the instrument was from 1-to-10 and there are six statements tied to each practice. This means there was a maximum score of 60 for each practice and a minimum score of six. Once every respondent had a calculated score for every practice, a mean and standard deviation for participants was calculated for comparing to available normative data as well as the qualitative data collected in this study.

### **Reporting the Findings**

The data were reported through five sections focused on the four research sub-questions, and the overarching research question. The primary format for reporting data was written descriptions. However, other elements including tables, and figures were incorporated as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested “an occasional chart, table or figure will enable readers to grasp major findings or ideas central to the study” (p. 282). Throughout, an effort was made to provide enough data to support the analysis without overburdening the reader (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The findings addressing the first three research sub-questions were reported in a similar format. These sections began with a detailed discussion of the themes that emerged (Creswell, 2014). This descriptive analysis included embedded quotations to highlight a point or to transition the narrative forward. These sections concluded with a summary table that included the themes, and quotations that typify each theme (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The final research sub-question included the reporting of both quantitative and qualitative data. A table compared normative data for the LPI with the mean scores of the participants, and this table was also supported with written insights of this comparison. An effort was made to integrate the data using a joint display of quotations that typify the usage of The Five Practices of

Exemplary Leadership, and quantitative data including the participant's mean scores for each practice (Creswell & Clark, 2018). A written discussion followed this table as a "researcher must interpret their combined results to assess how the analysis answers the mixed methods research questions" (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p. 233).

### **Trustworthiness**

Several strategies can be employed to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that researchers should use at least two of the nine validation strategies suggested in their text. This study employed four of these strategies including: triangulation, reflexivity, member checking, and thick description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher decided to bolster the trustworthiness beyond two validation strategies because this study may be considered "backyard" research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 154).

Credibility can be enhanced through triangulation, which in this studies case included the incorporation of multiple methods and sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple sources could "imply multiple copies of one type of source (such as interview respondents) or different sources of the same information" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305). Data for this study was triangulated between individual interviews and also included triangulation between interviews and leadership program information (e.g., syllabi, learning objectives, program requirements). Credibility was also enhanced through the triangulation mode of multiple methods through both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative LPI data was corroborated with the qualitative interviews.

Member checking was used as this tactic "is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). This strategy allowed participants to review and comment on the accuracy of the themes, analysis and conclusions of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose here was to ensure the

researcher was accurately representing the meaning given by participants. To this end, this study sought feedback from participants on the preliminary analysis and themes. Each participant received an email with an attachment that included themes, theme description, and supporting quotations from their specific interview. The email solicited feedback on the data analysis, and stated that a nonresponse would be interpreted as the participants' confidence in the accuracy of the representation presented. Three participants responded, and each confirmed the accuracy of the interpretation of content from their interviews.

Transferability is founded on the concept that “the original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298). The researcher's role ends with providing enough data for “appliers” to make an informed decision (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298). A rich description can be utilized to enhance transferability as to permit practitioners to determine the applicability to their own context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Lincoln & Guba 1985). The undergraduate leadership program involved in this study was thoroughly described including a rich description of the requirements and courses. In addition, an effort was made to include a rich description of the participants and findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Reflexivity involves researcher transparency about the values, and experiences they bring to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the instrumentation section, the researcher was transparent about his values as a leadership educator, his experiences with the phenomenon, and the theoretical lens applied to the study. Additionally, the researcher engaged in reflexive journaling immediately following each interview. These measures enhanced the integrity of the study and this “allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 249).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a comprehensive review of the methods used to conduct this study including an initial representation of the purpose and research questions. Taking a pragmatic worldview, the researcher justified the usage of a convergent embedded mixed methods design with quantitative data embedded in a primarily basic qualitative approach. To enhance transferability the chapter contained a rich description of the population, and a justification of the sampling method was included. This chapter incorporated details related to data collection, analysis, and reporting, which led into a final description of trustworthiness strategies utilized by the researcher.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore alumni' valuation of an undergraduate leadership program by gaining an understanding of what leadership learning and leadership behaviors have transferred into their work environment. Data were collected through one-hour semi-structured interviews with eight Empower Leaders alumni, and each participant also completed the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). The Empower Leaders program, described here using a pseudonym for participant confidentiality, is situated at a large university in the southeastern United States and is a co-curricular, four-year leadership development program. The data collected, analyzed and represented below were intended to address the following overarching research question: What is the perceived value of an undergraduate leadership program for alumni in their professional career? To explore this question, the following sub-questions guided this study:

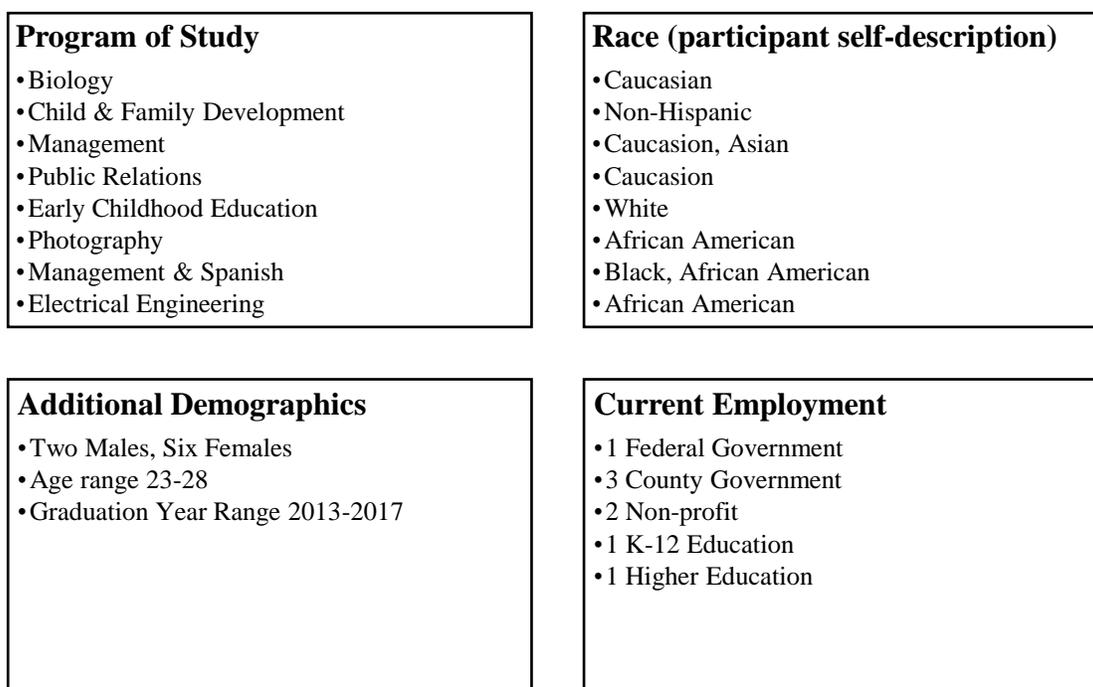
1. What attributes of the program have the most perceived value for program alumni?
2. What leadership learning effectively transfers into the work environments of program alumni?
3. What additional leadership learning would have been beneficial that was not included in the program?
4. How frequently do alumni who completed an undergraduate leadership program engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership?

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the analyzed qualitative and quantitative data collected from the participants via a semi-structured interview and completion of the LPI. The information presented was intended to include the necessary data to support the analysis while being mindful not to overburden the reader (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This

approach is consistent with the pragmatic worldview assumed by the researcher with a focus on a problem of practice delineated by the research questions. The findings will begin with participant demographics and characteristics delivered in a manner that recognizes the reader's need to assess transferability, while also maintaining participant confidentiality through careful disclosure of information. Next, a character composite will pull the reader into a deeper understanding of the participants' collegiate experiences while in the program. The remainder of the chapter will be structured around the four research questions and will consist of thematic findings supported by evidence found in the data.

### **Demographics and Characteristics**

This section provides an overview of the descriptive characteristics, demographics, employment settings, and collegiate experiences of the eight participants. Due to the small number of alumni who have completed all elements of the Empower Leaders program, carefully selected information will be disclosed to protect confidentiality, and some characteristics will be presented in aggregate form rather than directly associating specific details with individual participants. The participants included two males and six females, with an age range of 23-28. Every participant had a unique program of study while in college with a graduation year from the institution between 2013 and 2017. Three participants work for a county government, two work for non-profit organizations, and two others work in education. Figure 1 below provides a display of demographic information, and other descriptive characteristics without connecting characteristics around any specific individual by randomizing the order of information in each box.



*Figure 1.* Demographic information and other characteristics associated with eight Empower Leaders alumni participants.

The participants were highly engaged in campus life while in college, involved in service, and held multiple student leadership positions. They completed all requirements of the Empower Leaders program which included: completing three to four non-credit leadership courses, attending workshops, attending a leadership conference, completing 125 service hours, holding two leadership positions that involved educating peers, participating in a service trip on a school break, and completing a capstone leadership legacy project. They held various leadership positions on campus as orientation leaders, peer leaders in classrooms, members of executive boards in student organizations, trip leaders for out-of-town service trips, resident assistants in dorms, leadership positions in the Empower Leaders program, and peer facilitators in service-learning courses. The participants each held from three to seven student leadership positions while in college and engaged in a wide range of community service.

### **Character Composite**

Due to the small number of Empower Leaders alumni who have completed all elements of the program, participant profiles could not be utilized in order to protect anonymity. In lieu of this approach, a character composite will be employed, and will represent an amalgamation of experiences as well as characteristics of all eight participants. The following fictitious character (Lisa) and narrative will include direct quotations from multiple participants with occasional adaptations, highlighted in italics, to improve flow. Lisa is an amalgamation of all eight participants and has quotations from each participant. Her experience rings true to the data collected from all eight participants. Some quotations in the narrative also combine statements from two or more participants, and the narrative includes overlapping experiential themes of the participants. The purpose of the character composite is to provide a richer understanding of the participants' collegiate experiences, and to enhance the reader's ability to assess the transferability of the study to their specific context without breaching participant confidentiality.

#### **“Eat Your Vegetables”**

Lisa was nervous going into her first week of classes at a large college, and she did not know exactly what to expect. “I have no idea what I’m doing or what’s going on” she would say. This nervousness was coupled with a desire to make friends, and to in some way replicate the sense of fulfillment she experienced while being engaged in multiple extracurriculars in high school. During her first semester she was able to make some of these connections through her non-credit leadership course focused on her personal approach to leading others. “I was able to open up a whole lot and connected with a lot of students in the class who were involved in a lot of things across campus. *I made* really good friends with a lot of people.” The class was highly experiential, and she learned about herself as a leader. “I loved learning about myself and just

different ways that my personality applied to leadership. It was so reflective *and* helped me think about, ‘what are my core value?’”

During her first semester she also joined the film club as she hoped to continue her passion for making short films. Encouraged by the program administrator of Empower Leaders, she vocalized a desire to be the vice president of this organization and was able to begin this position her second semester. She learned some practical skills in this position. Basic things like “What information needs to be on *this* flyer?” But she also had to learn to work with others and negotiate conflict within the organization. “I kind of had to directly practice conflict resolution skills right there. It was also a lot of mediation involved in that position just because students are bound to disagree.” Lisa did not enjoy these moments but appreciated their value saying, “figuring out how to do that and please both parties was a good experience, but it was not one that I enjoyed at the time.”

During the first week of her sophomore year the Empower Leaders program announced some changes to the requirements. She remembers venting to some of her friends about the changes that frustrated her saying, “we came in under this and this was gonna count for this and now this has changed!” However, she decided to stick with it as her current leadership course, focused on leading in teams, was a bright spot in her week. The course “was just fun because it was the Strengths Quests.” I learned about “my strengths and how to build a team to complement and find that right balance.” In addition to learning to leverage individual strengths on a team in class, Lisa became comfortable engaging with others who were completely different from her as a resident assistant in the Kings dormitory. Years after graduating she says, “it really even helps me still today in my job. I’m working with *different* groups all the time. You’ve got diverse groups of people, diverse income, race, age.”

To meet her Empower Leaders requirements, she registered to participate on an alternative break trip to serve another community during spring break. Traveling with other college students to an island which included new cultural experiences, she served children with disabilities and terminal diseases. The trip was a transformative experience for her as she made connections to the coursework in Empower Leaders. “It *encompassed* working with a diverse group, knowing the strengths of your team members *and* critical thinking skills. It *also* helped me to understand the privilege I had and just like how much I had it good in life being healthy *and* able-bodied.” Through reflection with her peers she left with a sense that this was only the beginning of her active citizenship. “A lot of the reflection activities were built around *the trip with questions like*, ‘Okay, your service doesn’t stop here when we leave. How do you bring it to Home College? How do you bring that to any other community?’”

Feeling energized from this experience as well as hoping to finish her service hour requirements in Empower Leaders, she became heavily involved in a non-profit close to campus that served children with disabilities her junior year. This experience was coupled with a hybrid leadership course that involved taking an emotional intelligence assessment and working to develop her capacity to use emotional information as a leader. Her experience at the non-profit got off to a rough start. “I mean I had days where I didn’t know what the hell I was doing. I mean the situation was so just undermanaged, *and* there were days I was going to just quit. *I learned that* in any position, you’re not supposed to be this God of wisdom. You have team members, and the classes taught that.” Even though this experience “took a toll” on her she was thankful for her gains in emotional intelligence. “I loved EQI and I learned so much about myself. I did a lot of work in the activities with interpersonal skills.” Later she would say, “it

helped me get past some of the things that probably would have made me a very isolated *employee at work.*”

During her junior year, the program coordinator over Alternative Breaks approached Lisa and said “I think it’s time for you to lead a trip. You’ve shown that you can do things in this program, so I want you to lead a trip.” Feeling empowered she decided to lead a trip rather than simply travel as a participant during spring break. During the trip conflict arose as some of her peers complained about their service project. “So, they pulled us out of the *planned project* and had us *landscaping*. The students got really upset and they were grunting.” Lisa got the courage to confront these students that were hurting the groups dynamics. “I’m like, ‘It’s still service. It’s indirect service, but it’s still service to a community.’” Lisa gained confidence as a leader from this experience saying, “I gained some of that confidence. So not being afraid to go there, to express myself, *and* to push the students. It was really empowering for me as a student and kinda gave me the confidence I needed.” She also gained lasting friendships. “I personally still keep in contact with almost every student that went on that trip.”

As she approached her senior year, she began to realize that she would never finish the program if she did not start on her legacy capstone project soon. “I met another Empower Leader by the name of Saundra, and we linked up, we ended up doing our capstone project together.” They wrote a grant together to support a local non-profit in the area, and later Lisa would reflect on how important this experience was to her current work context. “I remember that we applied for a grant. That was my first foray into that as well, which now is a huge part of what I do is grant writing. That was really an important stepping stone I think for what I do now.” She also had to present her work at the Empower Leaders showcase. “It helped me with my presentation skills because with the showcase, you have to present. *It gave me* some personal

confidence around presentation skills.” Later that spring, Lisa graduated with a degree in Education and began her first full-time position as an educator.

In her new position she was grateful for the community she found in the program, the courses, and experiential components. “*I appreciated* the experience of putting your leadership into practice. It’s these aspects of putting it to the test, seeing what works and – if it doesn’t – not being disgruntled about it, but learning how to cope with it, *and* how to build on it. It’s the students that I met that I learned alongside and now I’m sharing in their journeys. And the mentors that I had. *I also appreciated* the in-person classes, *and* I definitely rely on the stuff that I learned there. There was just a lot of self-reflection that really prepared me for interviewing for jobs, and it definitely made me more confident going into the workforce for sure.” At some level, she equated the experience to eating a nice plate of kale. “I’m sure there were times where I’m like, ‘why am I doing this program. *It’s* so much work!’ But it really pushes you to do things that are helpful, it’s almost like, eat your vegetables.”

### **Participant Pseudonyms**

At the start of each interview participants created their own pseudonyms, but as previously described these pseudonyms could not be paired with individual participant profiles in order to maintain confidentiality. The eight participants generated the following pseudonyms: Britney, Karis, Lola, Olivia, Reese, Sarah, Thomas, and Will. These names will be utilized throughout the findings to enhance flow and to honor the participants’ wishes to use the pseudonym they created for themselves.

**Research Sub-Question 1: What attributes of the program have the most perceived value for program alumni?**

During the interview participants were asked, “What components of the Empower Leaders program would you say provided the most value for you today in the workplace?” Discussions stemming from this question led to five primary themes that alumni believed to be the most valuable attributes of the program including leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection. This section will conclude with a conceptual framework that explains how these program attribute themes fit together in practice.

**Leadership Experiences**

Leadership experiences, specific activities, or action-oriented components of the program were perceived as being valuable to program alumni. This included experiential components such as the requirement to hold leadership positions on campus, service requirements, the requirement to attend alternative break trips, leadership retreats, and other action-oriented experiences tied to the program. After being asked about the most valuable attributes in the program, Sarah stated, “The service requirements because I mean that’s what I’ve talked about the most I think was the AB trips, the [Summer Leadership and Service Program].” In this statement Sarah noticed that much of the interview to that point had focused on these experiential components. While discussing the most valuable attributes of the program, Britney echoed this theme saying, “I do think that the retreat that we went on was very helpful.” Finally, Thomas fully captured the essence of these leadership experiences from the program when he said:

The experience, the requirement of when you do [the leadership course while] you're in a role, putting your leadership into practice. I think the classes were great, but you know every time you know talking through today, it's always about what I did. It was the [executive leadership position]. It was the [other leadership position]. It's these aspects of putting it to the test, seeing what works and – if it doesn't – not being disgruntled about it, but learning how to cope with it, how to build on it and stuff like that. I think that is the most valuable thing is requiring experience, requiring those positions.

Thomas references the final hybrid leadership course in the program that requires holding a job or leadership position as well as other student leadership experiences, and he seems to rank the experiential components as having the highest value as compared to other portions of the program.

### **Learning Community**

The learning community and the relationships formed in the program were perceived as being valuable to program alumni. This included relationships with peers and mentor relationships with leadership educators in the program. These relationships continue to have value for alumni after graduation, were leveraged for career advancement, and the community found in the program was connected to the leadership learning. Britney stated, "I think it's just relationships that I was able to build with the leaders as well as also other students." She continues to rely on these relationships by "being able to reach back to them and say, 'Hey, I have this going on. Can you guide me in the right direction?'" Reese connected the learning with the Empower Leaders community stating, "It's the students that I met that I learned alongside and now I'm sharing in their journeys." Similarly, Karis discussed mutual aid found within the peer coaching component of the program.

And then I really highly value mutual aid now, which really came out in the coaching program, just being able to see your peers leading others and being able to look up to that and being able to go to them I thought was really, really important. And I kind of got that in so much as I was kind of in a community with the other coaches at any given point.

Karis found that peers leading each other and engaging together as a leadership learning community was a valuable attribute of the program. This continues to resonate in her current work environment as she still values mutual aid. Alumni also spoke of the importance of their mentor relationships with program staff or faculty they became connected with due to the program.

Lola connected with a faculty member through her capstone legacy project, and later leveraged this relationship to advance her goals. She referenced this connection and others stating, “I need recommendations for jobs or for – actually for my grad program, I needed professor recommendations and I was quick to go back to them and they were more than happy to help me out.” Reese stated that she attempts to mirror these mentor relationships in her current work. “And the mentors that I had. Those connections and trying to mimic that in my workplace.” Will best captured the essence of the learning community found in the program when he said:

I loved the program [Empower Leaders]. I wouldn't be who I am without it, to be honest, without my connections to mentors, people who I still talk to now like [program administrator], [office staff member], to help me get to grad school... It's even cooler for me to still have those connections with people who I was with all those years ago, like [specific student]. She and I [served together]. We were on [a student executive leadership team]. One of her best friends I met in [a leadership class] my first year and

we're really cool because of that. And so this meeting good people who I now can tap into across our nation if I so need to.

The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni highly value the learning community provided by the program and the benefits that have extended from this community beyond graduation.

### **Classroom Learning**

The learning that took place in the Empower Leaders classes have continued perceived value for alumni in their work environment. Participants completed either three or four non-credit leadership courses depending on when they finished the program. The courses were titled Self-Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Leading Positive Change, and Professional Development Seminar, the last of which was added to the program in 2013. After being asked about the most valuable attributes in the program, Britney stated, "I think the things that I learned in the classes..." Responding similarly, Sarah stated, "I would say the in-person classes. I think all-in-all we're more effective, but I definitely rely on the stuff that I learned there." More specifically, some appreciated the leadership inventories layered through the coursework. Will said, "I love the leadership inventories," while Reese stated, "the EQI was probably most helpful." Karis best captured the essence of the value of classroom learning found in the program when she said:

I guess the teams, the one that's called collaborative leadership, sorry, I mean, that one kind of the same thing I've been saying, being able to be aware of myself and of others and using that, and then organizations and communities [course] kind of instilled that active citizenship in me...

In this statement she connects two specific courses with some of her leadership learning. A significant portion of the alumni' leadership learning that will be expounded on, in the section addressing the second research question, came directly from the coursework as evidenced by their associated learning outcomes. Thus, the findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni highly value the classroom learning from the program.

### **Peer Coaching**

Peer coaching embedded in the Empower Leaders program was perceived as being valuable to program alumni. Peer coaching involved upperclassmen leading a group of freshmen through leadership modules over the course of a semester. The coaches would also have meetings together in preparation for these modules. This component of Empower Leaders started after the participants' first year of college, and therefore the participants' perspective is from the positional role of being a coach. After being asked about the most valuable attributes in the program, Sarah stated, "just being a Empower Leaders coach, that taught me a lot." Responding similarly, Thomas stated, "Even the little ones [experiences] of being a coach for a coaching group I think helps tenfold you know punch home the mission of Empower Leaders." Karis best captured the essence of the value of peer coaching when she said:

...definitely, the empowerment piece that was so important to me started with coaching... And so, that was really a launchpad for me was becoming a coach... But yeah, but just being on the leadership end of that, I really, really loved it... It was a cool opportunity for me to be able to pour into people who were just kinda getting started... And then I had a few that I coached that ended up being coaches themselves and ended up being on [Empower Leaders Advisory Council] and stuff like that, and so it was really cool to kinda see that come to fruition.

The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni highly value the experiences tied to peer coaching.

### **Intentional Reflection**

Intentional reflection, both individual and group discussions, emerged as a program attribute that was perceived as being valuable to program alumni. Karis stated, “There was just a lot of self-reflection that really prepared me for interviewing for jobs, prepared me for being an effective graduate student, and it definitely made me more confident going into the workforce for sure.” She further discussed unpacking various leadership assessments in the program and said, “It was never just information that was given to us. It was information that was given to us that we were challenged to really think about and really consider in our day-to-day practical application of these things.” Lola echoed this concept of reflection leading to application as she stated:

In all my other classes, we worked more based on theory in most of the information. In these [leadership courses], okay this is the theory this is the information, how could you apply this to your life? Or how do you apply this going forward in your group?

Thomas affirmed the reflective nature of the courses stating, “I remember how [Self-Leadership] and [Collaborative Leadership] were very reflective” and later added, “You know Empower Leaders taught the value of reflection.” Will described the larger group reflections that were enmeshed in the learning community. “I love learning about having these deep conversations and so we always had good conversations in class.” Sarah led some of these intentional reflections, engaging in experiential learning, as an alternative break trip leader.

A big part of our role was to lead the reflection at the end of the day. So, we gather the students, make the questions. That way we could show the impact and kind of dig a little deeper into the meaning of the service that we completed.

Reese truly captured the essence of intentional reflection across the Empower Leaders program when she said:

Reflection was such a big part of the program and I take that for granted because I think everyone just sits back and reflects and they don't, necessarily... It was a little bit different at every point but when I started out, in [the Self-Leadership course] we started drafting a leadership development plan. For me, that was reflecting on where I was at in my life and what were reasonable goals to have. Reflecting on what I learned about myself, whether it be through EQI, through the leadership experiences; not just doing all these disjointed experiences. It was more of a cohesive – and maybe that was just me, thinking that reflection was an important part. But I was always trying to connect how does this fit with this? What does this mean overall? In collaborative leadership [course] reflecting on wow, I have really different viewpoints from this person, and what does that mean for how we work together and how we'll be in an organization. In community leadership [course], reflecting on your place in the world, reflecting on your privilege; that was a huge thing I took away from that and from alternative break trips. Not to be ashamed of privilege but how to leverage that for people who have marginalized, and how to bring benefits to communities who may have not had the opportunities and really shift the scales. At every point, I feel like we were reflecting on the journey and what it would mean.

In summary, the following program attributes had the most perceived value for Empower Leaders alumni: leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching and intentional reflection. Leadership experiences included action-oriented components of the program such as the requirement to hold leadership positions, to complete service hours, attend alternative break trips or retreats, and other experiential activities. The learning community consisted of valuable relationships formed with peers and leadership educators in the program. Classroom learning continued to be leveraged by alumni in their work environment and included learning that took place within the non-credit classes embedded in the program. Peer coaching consisted of guiding freshmen through leadership modules, and alumni believed this experience was valuable from the positional role of being a coach. Finally, intentional reflection, both individual and group discussions, emerged as an attribute that was valuable to program alumni. Table 1 below provides a summary of the evidence supporting the five primary themes that alumni believed to be the most valuable attributes of the program including leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching and intentional reflection.

Table 1  
*Responses Typifying Themes of Program Attributes with the Most Perceived Value*

Theme	Response
Leadership Experiences	It's always about what I did... It's these aspects of putting it to the test, seeing what works... I think that is the most valuable thing is requiring experience, requiring those positions.
Leadership Experiences	If I had to pick one, then I would rely most heavily on the participation in an Alternative Break trip... because it encompassed kind of everything that I've talked about.
Learning Community	It's the students that I met that I learned alongside and now I'm sharing in their journeys. It's where they're at and what they're doing with this knowledge.
Learning Community	So, I think it's just relationships that I was able to build with the leaders as well as also other students. That's one major component.
Classroom Learning	I would say the in-person classes. I think all-in-all we're more effective, but I definitely rely on the stuff that I learned there.
Classroom Learning	I think the things that I learned in the classes...
Peer Coaching	The empowerment piece that was so important to me started with coaching ... And then I really highly value mutual aid now, which really came out in the coaching program
Peer Coaching	And then also just being a Empower Leaders coach, that taught me a lot.
Intentional Reflection	Reflection was such a big part of the program and I take that for granted because I think everyone just sits back and reflects and they don't, necessarily.
Intentional Reflection	I love learning about having these deep conversations and so we always had good conversations in class.

### **Conceptual Framework of Program Attributes**

The five program attributes that emerged from the data hold together within a conceptual framework that may be of benefit to practitioners. Intentional reflection, and the learning community were found to be embedded within the other program attributes of leadership

experiences, classroom learning, and peer coaching. The data supported this conclusion as participants frequently discussed intentional reflection or the learning community within the context of the other three attributes. For instance, Karis described reflecting on her values as a leader through classroom learning as she stated:

But I remember we had to write a reflective paper on it, and so I took it the two times, and then I was able to kind of reflect on how that semester had impacted me and how me reflecting on seeing what this inventory said about my values, and seeing where I had room for growth, and the things that maybe I didn't want to value as high as I did.

The reflection was a component of the classroom learning as Karis completed a written assignment required in her Self-Leadership course. Thomas described the reflection that occurred within the leadership experience of an alternative break trip. "I know a lot of the reflection activities were built around that of, 'Okay, your service doesn't stop here when we leave. How do you bring it to Home College? How do you bring that to any other community?'" Sarah led some of these reflections on alternative break trips as she described:

A big part of our role was to lead the reflection at the end of the day. So, we gather the students, make the questions. That way we could show the impact and kind of dig a little deeper into the meaning of the service that we completed.

The data also showed that the learning community was embedded within the program attributes of leadership experiences, classroom learning, and peer coaching. Karis described the learning community she found within peer coaching.

And then I really highly value mutual aid now, which really came out in the coaching program, just being able to see your peers leading others and being able to look up to that

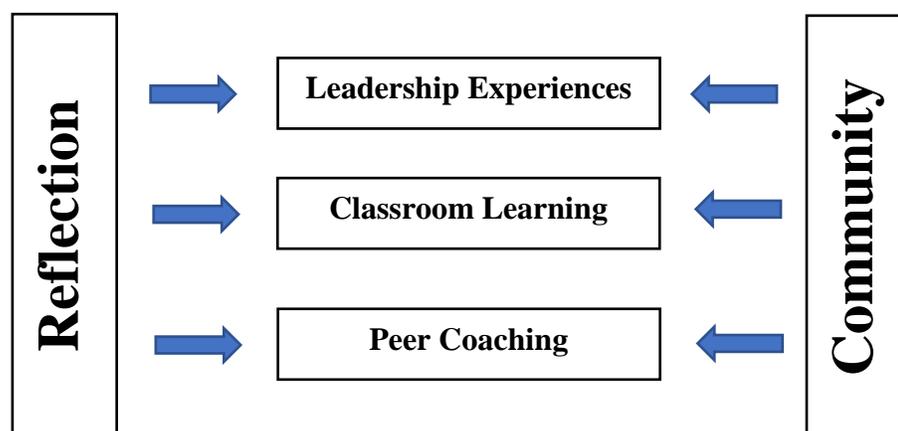
and being able to go to them I thought was really, really important. And I kind of got that in so much as I was kind of in a community with the other coaches at any given point.

Karis also referenced the learning community found within her leadership classes as she stated, “I remember making a lot of really good friends in that class.” Will made a similar connection between the classroom and the learning community as he said, “I was able to open up a whole lot and connected with a lot of students in the class who were involved in a lot of things across campus.” Lola echoed, “I remember becoming pretty close with the people in those classes.”

Britney revealed the learning community embedded within a leadership experience as she described developing a close friendship through a leadership retreat. “I left with a really good friend, and someone that I continued working with for years and years after the thing.” Karis described the bonding that occurred through a leadership experience or action-oriented activity in the program that included an obstacle course that was put together by a branch of the armed services for students in the program. She said, “That was really cool because we got to travel together and then do the thing, and it was hard, and muddy, and cold, and it just ended up being a really good bonding experience.” Similarly, Lola found community in the leadership experience of an alternative break trip as she said, “So, with that, I really connected with the people that I went on the trip with and then I’m also doing service while I was there.” This statement clearly showed that the “doing service” or leadership experience, had the learning community embedded within in it as she stated, “I really connected with people.”

In summary, the data showed that intentional reflection as well as the learning community were embedded within the program attributes of leadership experiences, classroom learning, and peer coaching. Figure 2 below summarizes this conceptual framework. In the

figure, the community and reflection attributes of the program surround the other program attributes. The arrows signify or show that both the learning community and intentional reflection have a relationship with or are embedded within the leadership experiences, classroom learning, and peer coaching.



*Figure 2.* Conceptual framework for five leadership program attributes valued most by alumni.

**Research Sub-Question 2: What leadership learning effectively transfers into the work environments of program alumni?**

A targeted question was asked during interviews to address this research question, however, during other portions of the interview participants described applying leadership learning from the program in their work environment. In most cases, instances of applying leadership learning were each coded around specific learning objectives found in the program and leadership courses. Two large clusters of applied leadership learning emerged including leading others and leading-self. The first was the leading others cluster, which included the following themes: collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, and negotiating conflict. The second was the leading-self cluster, which included the following

themes: strengths awareness, emotional intelligence (EI) awareness, and leadership confidence. Additionally, a third theme of applying experiential capital tied to the program emerged from the data during the first cycle of coding. The two larger clusters emerged during second cycle coding and the experiential capital theme did not conceptually fit within these two clusters. Experiential capital is therefore isolated and is presented here as a standalone theme.

### **Leading Others**

The leading others cluster of themes provided alumni with the competencies and leadership learning to effectively collaborate with others in their work environments. This learning occurred in the leadership classes and through other experiential components such as alternative break trips, service, and student leadership positions. Will captured the general essence of this cluster when he said, “for me it was learning how to better work with people and how to talk to people.” Similarly, Reese stated that the program gave her the ability to “know how I interact with others,” and Thomas referenced the “soft skills” he gained from the program. The leading others cluster included the following themes: collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, and negotiating conflict.

**Collaboration.** Alumni learned the general ability to collaborate with others in Empower Leaders, and they apply this skill in their work environment. Reese succinctly captured this theme. “As a [professional position] you have to collaborate. Those collaborative skills that I learned were very, very helpful.” Several participants provided examples of applying their learned capacity to collaborate within their work environment. Will stated:

I purposely went to communities and to offices to build collaboration and to have conversations about how we work together to better connect [specific population] to each other because the [specific population] often would just like get siloed off into our

community and not go to other people because they didn't feel comfortable. And so going to other departments and other people to create links and ways that made sense in a collaborative manner, right?

Britney had this to say regarding the application of collaboration:

I think a lot of this I've already mentioned, so collaboration-wise, so in my current team, there's a bunch of [specific professional position], but we don't have all the answers, and so we have to reach out to people in the community or youth in the community because I am sadly no longer a youth, so I don't know what youth want or need. So, you have to go to the people that things will affect, and so just being able to work across programs or disciplines and collaborate with a lot of people to get your work done.

Participants also made direct connections between their learned collaborative skills from the program and the application of these skills at work. Will made this direct connection when he stated:

When thinking about collaboration, I work with my [specific population] to make sure I'm building stuff with them and for them because – in my opinion – like I learned back at the courses, if I'm not a part of a community, I don't always know what they might need or want.

In this statement Will described an underpinning rationale for why collaboration is important that he learned through a leadership course. Finally, Britney best captured the essence of transferring the learned capacity to collaborate into the work environment. She stated, "So, collaboration-wise, so in the [leadership] classes, learning how to work with others and seeing that, of course, translate to alternative breaks, but then seeing it translate to my current job." Here Britney described learning about collaboration in leadership classes, getting the opportunity

to apply this learning through an experiential element of the program, and then applying this skill in her work environment. Thus, the findings support that Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer the leadership learning of collaboration into their work environments.

**Leveraging differences.** Alumni learned to leverage differences on a team and have applied this skill at work. This leadership learning includes effectively working with people who are different on a team or seeing differences on a team as an asset to be leveraged. These differences may include strengths, weaknesses, leadership styles and personality types. Olivia referenced this theme as she discussed working with several different generations in her office.

But, you've got several generations right there – to be able to work with folks and realize that person is definitely more of an introverted person. Or, they're focused on information. They wanna communicate XYZ. Those kinds of classes really helped you learn how to cater to others, not to be necessarily flow with the wind or anything. You still are yourself, and you're communicating what you need to communicate. But, everyone's different. They're not gonna take warm, fuzzy hugs. Some folks want things cut and dry. And, others are more logical. And, they don't wanna talk about the feelings and emotional sides of issues. I remember that class in particular referencing it back over time.

In this statement Olivia described intentionally thinking about the different personality types she works with and tailoring her communication to meet their individual needs. She also mentioned acquiring this learning in her Empower Leaders leadership courses. Karis referred to this as “people dynamics,” and echoed applying the capacity to be observant of other people with whom she works.

Definitely working on teams, being in [my field] is hard. There are a lot of just people dynamics, I mean, staff dynamics, and I have 500 people dynamics, and being in Empower Leaders prepared me for that because it made me much more aware of myself and much more observant and intuitive with other people. And so, if I'm able to be intuitive of other people, I'm able to navigate these kind of crazy dynamics of working in [my field] to be more effective for myself and for the people around me.

Britney referenced specifically leveraging differences for the betterment of her team when stating, "so learning how to work with a lot of people in different leadership areas and just bringing it all together to be one team." Olivia referenced the rationale for leveraging differences noting, "They wanna do individual work. Overall, I know that's not what's productive. And, what's really gonna make the best product is multiple perspectives. And, people feel more fulfilled when they're working in a group." Finally, Lola best captured the essence of applying the capacity to leverage differences on a team when she stated:

So, definitely understanding that people are different. Understanding that even though you can have a group that is passionate about the same thing, the way that they get there could be different, their personality types can be different, and essentially learning that that's okay. And it's easier to just embrace it rather than try to fight it. And I have to preach that all the time in my classes and just to myself sometimes too. Some people really get under your skin and understanding that they have strengths, you have strengths, they have weaknesses, you have weaknesses, your strengths aren't necessarily their strengths and that's okay. Everybody's not gonna take your advice. So, I think that is probably the main take away. If everybody is different, but everybody has something that they can bring to the table.

Lola referenced both differing personality types and strengths on a team. She believed “everybody has something they can bring to the table.” The findings have supported the conclusion that Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer the leadership learning of leveraging differences on a team into their work environments.

**Communication.** Alumni acquired the ability to communicate in various settings through experiences tied to the program and applied this skill in their work environment. This included verbal communication, listening, or presentation skills. Lola connected communication with listening and the way she engages others through servant leadership.

Now, in my leadership role, I use that so much and it’s pretty effective. I mean, with servant leadership you have to know how to communicate and also with that communication you have to know how to listen and listen to the needs of the people that you’re leading.

Thomas referenced listening as well when he described a specific instance when he helped a colleague through a difficult circumstance. “We had coffee together and I just remembered part of the aspect of coaching and leadership is not having more the wisdom but having listening skills to be ready.” Thomas believed he had honed these listening skills through his experiences from peer coaching. Sarah believed her learned presentation skills helped her advance at work.

It helped me with my presentation skills because with the showcase, you have to present. A lot of my thesis with [my legacy project], I had to present that. So, with my [specific position], I quickly learned that the [others] in our group did not like to stand up in front of people and talk. I would say the presentation skills and stuff that has encouraged me.

I guess I just didn't realize that so many people just didn't like to present, but it's kind of helped me get ahead at my work...

In this statement Sarah recalled presenting her legacy project to a large audience and transferred this experience into her work environment. Will made several connections pertaining to communication. He recalled his capacity to tailor communication for different people. "And then when thinking about communication, for me, it's thinking about how these students and my colleagues like to be communicated to and how best to do that." In term of presenting, he stated, "Learning how to relay information to people and communicate in ways that made sense also for my presentation using text-in apps, giving out information, talking to people, being interactive, to engage them really in the conversation." He further believed that he learned about himself as a communicator through the program.

For me, I think it's like my communication skills. So, learning some of that, again, when I was at Empower Leaders. I learned I'm pretty funny. I'm pretty good at breaking down information in a way that's accessible again to people.

Thus, the findings support that Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer the leadership learning of communication into their work environments.

**Diversity awareness.** Alumni gained an awareness of working with diverse people, with differing backgrounds, from experiences tied to the program and apply this awareness in their work environments. This included awareness surrounding race, gender, age, different cultures, income, nationality, disabilities, gender sexual minority identity or other factors. Sarah connected this awareness to her work environment from learning she garnered during alternative break trips.

So, for example, like with [out-of-town non-profit], we worked with mostly kids who have terminal diseases. So, we worked with them half the time and then we worked with kids with disabilities during the other half of the trip. So, knowing how to interact with different populations, which is super impactful with my job right now because I am going [to unfamiliar locations] and I'll be working with different cultures, different viewpoints.

Thomas gained diversity awareness during alternative break trips as well stating, "...it was working with Native American population – the [specific tribe] and the [specific tribe]. And this was freshman year winter break and what struck me is this trip was seeing the impact of different cultures that I thought I knew." Also reflecting on alternative break experiences Reese applies this awareness to her work environment and connects diversity awareness to social justice.

I think, too, there was a lot of – with the alternative break program a commitment to social justice. That's a huge thing in [my specific field] right now, equitable practices. I don't know how much you know about [specific field], but with [specific item in our field we] are we really giving them the most equitable chances to do things? Are we setting goals that are ambitious for them? We're not wanting to limit [specific population] because of X factor A, B or C. The commitment to social justice is really something that we're having to strive for.

In this statement Reese is specifically referencing meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities. Will referenced connecting with people from different backgrounds, either rural or urban, in his work environment.

And so breaking down things in a tangible, easy to access way for students and then with diversity and inclusion just learning how to have the conversation really with people,

talking to people from all kind of walks of life like from [specific urban city] and the metro area to somewhere in a small town like [specific rural town] about the same kind of issues.

In this instance, Will utilized his awareness of diverse backgrounds to determine the best way to connect with each individual in his work environment. Earlier in his interview, Will described gaining insights surrounding diversity from his experiences in Empower Leaders classes with diverse student leaders.

I was thinking my biggest again for that would be diversity and inclusion because we worked with so many different student leaders at that time and they have come from that program. They see us start with five or six of us Empower Leaders to bloom into what it is and that has been pretty cool and before I even left, there were so many more people that were joining and so giving different perspectives in class around what they valued, what they believed in, what they wanted to see from the world, and different identities too around like where they're from around the world, around the state, pretty cool stuff.

Through experiences in class and having a diverse leadership learning community, Will became more aware of diverse perspectives. Olivia best captured the essence of utilizing learned diversity awareness in her work environment when she stated:

I was a [specific student leadership position] for three years. That's huge. And, it really even helps me still today in my job because as a [specific job title], I'm working with [different] groups all the time. You've got diverse groups of people, diverse income, race, age.

Olivia believed she gained diversity awareness in a specific student leadership position, and she continues to utilize this awareness in her work environment. Thus, the findings support

that Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer the leadership learning of diversity awareness into their work environments.

**Negotiating conflict.** Alumni learned skills surrounding conflict negotiation or about conflict-styles through experiences tied to the program and have applied this learning in their work environments. Olivia referenced learning about negotiating conflict in class, then through experiences tied to the program, and finally applying this leadership learning at work. In class she learned about conflict styles.

I remember Conflict Styles and [Collaborative-Leadership course]. That was a big one, too. It helped me a lot in my personal relationship with my now husband. He was a turtle, and I was a lion – figuring out those kinds of techniques.

She also was given the opportunity to practice conflict negotiation through her experiences tied to a specific leadership position she held on campus. She described this experience as “some intense stuff for interpersonal conflicts.” She also applied this learning in her work environment when she stated:

And, a lot of it, you are dealing with interpersonal conflicts as well because a lot of it is kind of someone being the squeaky wheel at a [specific type of meeting]. Or, you’re trying to balance these public values that people may have issues with about security or freedom kind of matching up together and having to deal with working with the community but being more of a conduit for that group. We definitely don’t wanna tip the scales in any direction of the way the community’s moving. It’s whatever they want. I think [specific student leadership position] was huge in that aspect. I still think about it all the time.

In this statement, Olivia discussed helping different groups work through conflicting values at work and believed her prior student leadership position equipped her to be effective in this area. Lola connected her experiences leading meetings in a student leadership position to her ability to navigate conflicts in meetings in her current work environment.

...kind of running a meeting back in how when someone disagrees in public in the meeting, telling them what I want after, maybe don't have all of that conflict and chaos take place in the meeting. So, all of that I use all the time.

Reese best captured the essence of applying learned conflict negotiation in her work environment. She connected this learning generally to the program, but also to her student leadership positions she held as an undergraduate. She noted:

That's what I do all the time, reconciling different viewpoints, which I started learning in my leadership roles. But in Empower Leaders that's something that I do a lot. A lot of times [specific professional roles] don't agree with [other specific professional role], [specific roles] don't agree with the [specific population], and [my specific position] fills that unifying role. "We all have to make a decision and it has to be a team decision."

That's the biggest way I'm applying it now.

Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer the leadership learning of negotiating conflict into their work environments. Table 2 below provides a summary of the evidence supporting the five themes associated with the leading others cluster including: collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, and negotiating conflict.

Table 2  
*Responses Typifying Themes Found in the Leading Others Cluster*

Theme	Response
Collaboration	As a [specific professional position] you have to collaborate. Those collaborative skills that I learned were very, very helpful.
Collaboration	So, collaboration-wise, so in the [leadership] classes, learning how to work with others and seeing that, of course, translate to alternative breaks, but then seeing it translate to my current job.
Leveraging Differences	So, I think that is probably the main take away. If everybody is different, but everybody has something that they can bring to the table.
Leveraging Differences	Overall, I know that's not what's productive. And, what's really gonna make the best product is multiple perspectives
Communication	For me, I think it's like my communication skills. So, learning some of that, again, when I was at Empower Leaders. I learned I'm pretty funny. I'm pretty good at breaking down information in a way that's accessible again to people.
Communication	I would say the presentation skills and stuff that has encouraged me. I guess I just didn't realize that so many people just didn't like to present, but it's kind of helped me get ahead at my work...
Diversity Awareness	And, it really even helps me still today in my job because as a [specific professional position], I'm working with [specific] groups all the time. You've got diverse groups of people, diverse income, race, age.
Diversity Awareness	When thinking about diversity and inclusion, I think about when I'm working with [specific group], the different perspectives that could affect them.
Negotiating Conflict	That's what I do all the time, reconciling different viewpoints, which I started learning in my leadership roles.
Negotiating Conflict	Kind of running a meeting back in how when someone disagrees in public in the meeting, telling them what I want after, maybe don't have all of that conflict and chaos take place in the meeting. So, all of that I use all the time.

### **Leading-Self**

The leading-self cluster provided alumni self-awareness and an internal capacity to lead in their work environment. Britney captured the general essence surrounding the type of learning associated with this cluster stating, “So, I think a lot of what Empower Leaders did was teach me about myself and what I’m capable of doing...” and Karis echoed this sentiment stating, “I learned a lot about myself through those courses.” Lola connected this self-discovery to leadership.

Well, it emphasized the importance of knowing yourself and how once you know yourself and you know your leadership style, you can figure out which – what things you need to improve on and what things you naturally do well, so when you are in a leadership position you kinda know what to look out for.

The leading-self cluster included the following themes: strengths awareness, emotional intelligence (EI) awareness, and leadership confidence.

**Strengths awareness.** Alumni gained an awareness of their own personal strengths through experiences tied to the program and have applied this learning in their work environments. Much of this awareness derived from learning about their individual talent themes through taking a specific assessment in the collaborative leadership course. Sarah referenced the assessment as she affirmed that she continued to utilize her identified strengths from the program. “So, StrengthsQuest is something I’ve carried with me throughout.” Thomas described how the program encouraged the continued application of strengths awareness beyond the program.

‘Yeah, you now know your strengths. You now know your weaknesses. You know this and that. What does it mean? How can you build on this?’ Not just, ‘Oh, I’m a WOOer. Okay, how do you use your WOO? How do you use your other strengths?’

In this statement Thomas described a specific strength found in the assessment, and how he was encouraged in Empower Leaders to utilize this strength in other contexts. When asked, “What components of the Empower Leaders Program provide the most value for you today in the workplace?” Will immediately referenced his strengths stating, “I love the leadership inventories. I love StrengthsQuest.” He also was able to recall each of his top five strengths from the assessment, and his self-awareness of his ability to build relationships.

For me, it was realizing I was good at talking with people because my top five at that point were like positivity, adaptability, input, responsibility, and connectedness. And so a lot were in the relationship building domain and so realizing that I was actually good at it. I didn’t even recognize it.

Lola best captured the essence of learning and applying strengths awareness in her work environment. “In Empower Leaders I think I remember taking an assessment – strength quiz, I think it was and I remember one of my strengths being inclusion or being inclusive. And I do use that all the time.” Lola remembered a specific strength, including others, she had identified through the assessment, and described how she specifically used this strength at work when she stated:

And we all know what it has felt like to be excluded from something that we really want to be involved in or when we feel that our voice wasn’t heard. And so now when I hold meetings, when I’m facilitating training classes, even if somebody has something to say that’s not necessarily helpful or maybe is off trend or where we’re going with the conversation, I still allow them to put their opinion because of something I learned in Empower Leaders and also just from knowing that as a strength.

Lola gained strengths awareness from the program and continued to utilize her ability to include others at work. Thus, the findings support that Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer the leadership learning of strengths awareness into their work environments.

**Emotional intelligence awareness.** Alumni have applied emotional intelligence (EI) learning from the program at work or an awareness of their own emotional intelligence from the program has value in their work environment. Much of this awareness derived from learning about their own emotional intelligence through taking a specific assessment in a hybrid leadership course in Empower Leaders. The course required students to maintain a job or leadership position during the primarily online course that had limited face-to-face instruction. In the class, students engaged in reflective prompts surrounding EI in the workplace. Referencing the EI assessment, Reese stated, “I loved EQI and I learned so much about myself and about emotional intelligence...” and Thomas also appreciated the assessment stating, “EQI taught a lot of the soft skills that you need.” Thomas further expounded on EI self-awareness he gained.

So, that’s why I was like, ‘I’m really bad at empathy.’ That’s the one thing I always remember, and I remember all the activities and I took them seriously at first. I think the first two or three reflection where it was like, ‘Go out and work on this skill. Be mindful about for a week and log what you –‘I was like, ‘Oh, this is crap. I’m never gonna get good at this.’ But when it came to empathy, I was so bad at empathy. I know I harp on it because it really shocked me.

Through the activities and assessment in the Empower Leaders course, Thomas gained an awareness of an area of weakness in terms of his EI. Later in the interview he stated, “I’ve

certainly gotten better at my weak points with EQI,” which showed his continued awareness and application of EI. Britney directly referenced using EI at work as she recalled:

So, that was the first time I had learned about emotional intelligence instead of IQ I guess, so that I still use to this day in the sense that teaching other people that what someone’s – we call it book smart – what they have to bring to the table, that’s only half of what you really need. You need to be able to communicate with people. You need to be on the same level as people and meet people where they are.

Lola applied EI in a specific instance at work when she described:

When somebody that I’m working with drops the ball, I make sure – if they’re already disappointed, so Empower Leaders teaches you to kinda keep your emotions to yourself, don’t blow up because that just never looks good in public, right? So, even though my mind it’s very disappointing...

In this statement Lola practiced impulse control and controlling her expressions, which is a component of EI she stated to have learned through the program. Reese best captured the essence of learning and applying EI awareness in her work environment. Describing her learned awareness, she stated, “I think, for me, flexibility was really low...” and noted that “interpersonal skills” was another area of growth for her. She further believed her co-workers positive perception of her was tied to EI.

I found when I was a [specific professional position] people would always tell me “You don’t [do your job] like a first year [specific position].” I would sit back and think, “Why is that? What’s making them say that? What am I doing differently?” They would say that I had really good rapport with [specific population]. I really brought it back to EQI and the things I learned in that.

Reese also concluded, “It helped me get past some of the things that probably would have made me a very isolated [specific position]” and “I would say, as far as just the on-paper requirements [in Empower Leaders], the EQI was probably most helpful. But truly, it’s the human element.” Thus, the findings support that Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer the leadership learning of EI awareness into their work environments.

**Leadership confidence.** The program gave alumni additional confidence to lead and have carried this confidence into their work environment. This confidence was often gained during the experiential components of the program. Sarah believed she grew in confidence after she failed to advocate for her point of view during one of her first alternative break trips. “And it was my first alternative break trip, so I think if it was like my sixth one – like I saw myself grow – I was more confident to confront them.” In a similar experience, Will gained confidence as an alternative break trip leader. “I think one example I think about clearly is gaining confidence for me is one year I went to [specific state] and – when we got there – the trip that we had planned completely changed...” Will later described this confidence transferring into his work environment. He stated, “I would say currently now with that confidence, I’m not afraid to be direct and honest with people and to get my point across in the appropriate ways with different populations.” Lola’s gain in confidence as a leader was associated with her shifting definition of leadership learned through the program. She noted:

Never happened before I was in Empower Leaders because it built the confidence that I needed in myself to become – to be a leader and to change my dynamic of what a leader was. It could be that prior to that I just thought that a leader was a dictator and I didn’t want to be that, I don’t know. When Empower Leaders introduced you can be nice and

take other people's thoughts into consideration and be a good leader – It kind pushed me into the different wavelength of what leadership is.

Lola summarized this new-found confidence stating, “And it wasn't until then – until I was in the Empower Leaders Program that I realized I could be a leader.” Finally, Karis best captured the essence of applying increased leadership confidence in her work environment.

Just right off the bat, I felt like just Empower Leaders gave me the tools, and the social support, and the resources that I needed to be more than I thought that I could be, and that was really helpful in giving me the confidence to go for jobs like this where I'm now the youngest person on staff by multiple years, and I'm leading our biggest volunteer base for [specific organization] of 4,000 people.

Thus, the findings support that Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer the leadership learning of negotiating conflict into their work environments. Table 3 below provides a summary of the evidence supporting the three themes associated with the leading-self cluster including: strengths awareness, EI awareness, and leadership confidence.

Table 3  
*Responses Typifying Themes Found in the Leading-Self Cluster*

Theme	Response
Strengths Awareness	I remember one of my strengths being inclusion or being inclusive. And I do use that all the time... I think it plays into my kind of democratic way of leading, of wanting everybody's voice to be heard. I don't like when people are excluded...
Strengths Awareness	What does it mean? How can you build on this?' Not just, 'Oh, I'm a WOOer.' 'Okay, how do you use your WOO? How do you use your other strengths?
EI Awareness	At one point, I even contacted [Home College Staff Member] when I was [doing my specific job]. I was like 'Thank you so much for EQI because it really did help me.'
EI Awareness	So, that was the first time I had learned about emotional intelligence instead of IQ I guess, so that I still use it to this day...
Leadership Confidence	Never happened before I was in Empower Leaders because it built the confidence that I needed in myself to become – to be a leader.
Leadership Confidence	Just right off the bat, I felt like just Empower Leaders gave me the tools, and the social support, and the resources that I needed to be more than I thought that I could be, and that was really helpful in giving me the confidence to go for jobs like this where I'm now the youngest person on staff...

### **Experiential Capital**

The experiential capital theme has been isolated because it did not conceptually fit with the leading-self or the leading others cluster. It is presented in the findings as a standalone theme that cut across the data. Alumni had experiences tied to the program that continued to be directly applicable at work. The prior programmatic experiences were valuable for them in their current work environment or may have provided specific job skills. Some of the learned skills were simple, like learning to design a flyer, and others were more complex such as designing an experiential program for an organization. Olivia described a specific skill she acquired, while working with a non-profit due to the service requirements in Empower Leaders.

I remember that we applied for a grant. That was my first foray into that as well, which now is a huge part of what I do is grant writing. That was really an important stepping stone I think for what I do now.

This experience continued to have value for Olivia in her current work environment as she writes grants in her current professional role. Lola described gaining experiential capital from her capstone leadership project.

So being in Empower Leaders and having to organize my own [capstone project] I feel like I'm well versed in planning events, planning sessions, and all that. What information needs to be on the flyer? From the very basic things like that all the way up to the actual implementation. And so that's something I use all the time.

In this statement, Lola described the practical skills she developed through implementing her capstone project and noted that she continues to utilize these skills in her work environment. Sarah also applied experiential capital from her capstone project. "I think doing the Empower Leaders project – going from start to finish, like finding a problem, doing the analysis, showing impact – I brought that to [specific professional position], I would say."

Interestingly, Thomas and Karis described implementing a similar programmatic structure from peer coaching to a program they developed at work. Thomas said, "They're building a mentor program for the [specific organization] and I'm on the planning committee and I'm essentially cloning coaching to a lesser extent." Similarly, Karis said, "And so, I made the organization of the program much more concrete based on the organization of the coaching program." Additionally, Karis utilized other experiential capital from the program in her current professional role that includes leading volunteers.

I wouldn't have any experience leading people, specifically leading volunteers, if it weren't for Empower Leaders and what that kind of led for me because it started with being a coach of this 8-10 students, and then I became a [specific student leadership position], and now I'm leading 20 or 30 volunteers, and it just kinda built on itself from there, but it started with Empower Leaders.

Finally, Britney best captured the essence of gaining and applying experiential capital from the program to her work environment. In a new position she had to develop a program that had no foundation. She was able to have confidence and rely on her experience developing a program through her Empower Leaders capstone project. She recalled:

I was given the direction to rebuild the [specific] program when I first got my job, and so I kinda thought back, like I've kind of done something similar to this before. So, I started a program from basically nothing and had to build it, get it approved and everything, and so I saw that translate over into my job because I was given nothing but a list of sites they had gone to years before, and basically had to rebuild it to the program that it is today.

Above, Britney described building her leadership capstone project "from basically nothing," which included an approval process and actual implementation. She believed this experiential capital transferred to her work environment as she was tasked with rebuilding a program in her professional role. Thus, the findings support that Empower Leaders alumni effectively transfer experiential capital tied to the program into their work environments.

To summarize the findings surrounding the second research question, as per the findings, Empower Leaders alumni did effectively transfer leadership learning associated with the program to their current work environments. The learning that effectively transferred to work emerged from the data in two larger clusters containing multiple themes. The first cluster,

leading others, included the following themes: collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, and negotiating conflict. The leading-self cluster included the following themes: strengths awareness, emotional intelligence (EI) awareness, and leadership confidence. Additionally, another theme of applying experiential capital tied to the program was presented as a standalone theme.

**Research Sub-Question 3: What additional leadership learning would have been beneficial that was not included in the program?**

During the interview participants were asked, “What would you say is missing from the Empower Leaders program that would benefit your effectiveness at work today?” Discussions stemming from this question led to varying responses with limited conceptual overlap across the data. Due to this limited overlap, only two themes could be identified including alumni group and career focus. This section provides a brief description of the two themes along with supporting evidence in the data and concludes with individual program recommendations from participants.

**Alumni Group**

Two alumni believed Growing leaders should maintain some level of contact with alumni. This theme included keeping alumni connected with each other, forming an alumni group, or providing additional leadership learning to alumni through contact with the program. Capturing this theme, Britney suggested:

I think possibly having a Empower Leaders alumni group that you can kind of go back to and say, ‘Hey, I’m experiencing this at work,’ and I think that sometimes people who are not involved in the specific situation, they’re able to look at it from a different lens, and so if these are people that you’ve gone through a program with for four years of

undergrad, you're able to trust them and the opinions that they give, and so just bringing situations to them, see what they say, and then being able to apply that to situations at work.

Reese believed a similar group could be helpful, but she specifically suggested that the program itself could provide continued learning or support for alumni. She suggested:

I think continued support because I see a lot of persons who were in the program, they're doing great things and I hope that they're still implementing what they learned, and I know a lot of them are. But I think as they've gone on to bigger professional endeavors, ways to still connect would be really good and ways to get a refresher on some of the things, so that – the skills that we learned, we were applying them to building them for an unknown future. Now that you're living that future, if there could be a way, even a seminar or something where they could brush up on their skills and really relate it to their current workplace that would be interesting. I know that would be hard, but keeping people engaged. Not making sure that they're applying this but supporting their further application of the learning.

Reese wanted alumni to “still connect” as well as “get a refresher on” the application of their leadership learning in their work environment. Two participants believed an alumni group was missing from the program, and this represented all the data that supports the alumni group theme.

### **Career Focus**

The second theme, career focus, emerged from two other alumni who believed the program content could be more focused on using leadership learning in future careers and having the program more focused on future work. Two participants believed the program focused

heavily on service, and that a more career-oriented focus might have been helpful. Lola captured this sentiment as she stated:

I think something that connects to the career more would have been helpful. Because it was so much focused on service and so much focused on – which is fabulous. I actually really enjoyed the certain aspects but I think if it geared it towards how these things could tie into a career and also helped people figure out what their career could be related to service, that would be really good.

Thomas also made this connection, and believed the program relied on a service orientation. He said:

I think the aspect of the work... It [Empower Leaders] was very civic based. It felt more like if you're going to work in a nonprofit, oh if you're going to do these acts of service every weekend. Hey, you're gonna be on the board of a non-profit.

After discussing the service focus of the program, Thomas began to give examples of the type of career focus that he believed to be missing from the program. He stated:

...but it would be so much more beneficial learning – like I said – like, “How do you work with a coworker that you don't like or you all don't mesh well and you're on a team?” Learning how to survive in an organization and not getting flustered or pissed off that your organization does something stupid, you know? We want our leaders in this Fortune 50 or Fortune 500 – if they want to be – we need to give them the skills to say, ‘Hey, the number one company on the Forbes list isn't perfect and here's how you take your leadership, take your challenging the process and do it properly where you're not fired every six months because you're pissing off some management and doing it right.’ I think that would be – If I had that now, my job would be like 10 times easier.

Thomas juxtaposed service every weekend or serving on a non-profit board with applying leadership in the corporate sector. His examples of career focused leadership learning included challenging the process appropriately with managers and working with a difficult coworker.

Table 4 below includes a summary of the supporting evidence for the alumni group and career focus themes.

Table 4

*Responses Typifying Themes of Alumni Program Recommendations*

Theme	Response
Career Focus	I think something that connects to the career more would have been helpful. Because it was so much focused on service and so much focused on – which is fabulous. I actually really enjoyed the certain aspects but I think if it geared it towards how these things could tie into a career.
Career Focus	I think the aspect of the work. So, when I went through it, I always came in at a weird time because the first half of my Empower Leaders it was when it was a different office name, and it was very community-based. It was very civic based. It felt more like if you're going to work in a nonprofit, oh if you're going to do these acts of service every weekend. Hey, you're gonna be on the board of a nonprofit.
Career Focus	Maybe something about kinda the real-world aspects that if you really wanna do public service, this is what it looks like.
Alumni Group	I think possibly having a Empower Leaders alumni group that you can kind of go back to and say, 'Hey, I'm experiencing this at work,'
Alumni Group	I think continued support because I see a lot of persons who were in the program, they're doing great things and I hope that they're still implementing what they learned and I know a lot of them are. But I think as they've gone on to bigger professional endeavors ways to still connect would be really good and ways to get a refresher on some of the things...

### **Other Program Recommendations**

The remainder of the program recommendations from alumni varied widely and did not contain overlapping concepts. Sarah believed she was afforded opportunities to practice conflict

negotiation but wanted more leadership learning on the topic. She said, "...not just learning through the examples or learning as conflict arose, but just having a session or making it one of the Empower Leaders monthly meetings, something like that." Will recognized that learning on diversity took place in the program but believed a more intentional focus on this topic could have been beneficial. He stated:

Even though it was kind of infused in there here and there, it would be cool to have a course, I think, given our current climate around our nation, just the world at large, and what we're evolving into, a conversation around – or class around – diversity and inclusion.

Britney discussed how she found herself in another state professionally and did not have many connections. She believed she would have benefitted with more knowledge on how to find a mentor and how to develop this type of relationship. She said:

I knew no one here, and even though I knew I needed some type of mentor, I think knowing how to possibly go about that would've made the process maybe easier to transition to, like if you want a mentor, this is how a mentor-mentee relationship would work.

Finally, Karis was unable to identify an area she believed was missing from the program. "I don't know. It was so thorough from start to finish. Oh, gosh. I'd be curious to other people's answers to those questions. I don't know." Every participant provided a specific program recommendation they believed was missing from the program except for Karis.

**Research Sub-Question 4: How frequently do alumni who completed an undergraduate leadership program engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership?**

A mixed methods approach was utilized to address this question including quantitative data from the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), and qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews. Two targeted questions were utilized during the interview to address this research question, however, during other portions of the interview participants described applying The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership in their work environment. These instances were each coded around one of the five practices including: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). Analysis of the qualitative data revealed that Empower Leaders alumni do engage in the five practices in their work environments.

### **Model the Way**

Model the way is typified by a leader who sets the example for his or her followers. Leaders should clarify their values, affirm the values of the group, and then align their behaviors with these deeply held beliefs (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15). The LPI includes six behavior statements tied to Model the Way, and these statements were also utilized to code instances when alumni engaged in this practice at work. Empower Leaders alumni do engage in behaviors associated with Model the Way at work.

Thomas discussed employing his personal values at work, while recognizing shared values within an organization. He stated, “I always go back – especially in my current job – it’s all about the values I bring to the workplace. Values are constantly brought up. In the corporate environment, you know operations have values.” One participant (pseudonym omitted intentionally), expressed a deeply held value taken into the workplace:

For me, that was – it was just solidified there – has always been public education. That is what I am committed to and fiercely committed to, probably to the point that it annoys some people. I believe in the power of public education. I've seen the difference that it makes in lives. I know that it is a broken system but it's a worthy system.

This participant's pseudonym is omitted here as the individual shared the deep value connection to the field of education. This clarified and shared value with colleagues, likely sets an example as this individual described a fierce commitment to public education. Sarah best captured the practices of Model the Way as she described bringing these behaviors from program experiences to her work environment. Sarah stated:

I think the biggest one is like your leadership profile like, 'Who are you as a leader and what traits do you want to have?' So, I quickly learned that I wanted to – and this is so cliché but – lead by example. So, throughout the alternative break trips or throughout the [summer leadership and service program], I made a point to do kind of like the yuckiest jobs. So, for example, on the animal rescue trip, I noticed that none of our group wanted to clean out the cat cages. So, as the leader of the group, I was like, 'You know what? I'll do it.' So, definitely lead by example because you have to show the people that you're leading that you're willing to do it and that's kind of how I see in my job too.

Setting the example is at the heart of Model the Way, and Sarah expressed taking this approach from service experiences in Empower Leaders to her work. The qualitative data provided a baseline that Empower Leaders alumni do engage in Model the Way, and the upcoming section containing quantitative data will corroborate this reality, while providing additional information regarding frequency.

### **Inspire a Shared Vision**

This practice involves imagining and communicating a better, more exciting future for a group or organization. The leader casts a common vision that taps into the aspirations of the group, while bringing excitement to future possibilities (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15). The LPI includes six behavior statements tied to Inspire a Shared Vision, and these statements were also utilized to code instances when alumni engaged in this practice at work. Empower Leaders alumni do engage in behaviors associated with Inspire a Shared Vision at work.

Britney engaged in this practice as she attempted to garner support for her current organization. “So, being able to go out with – well, creating a donation letter and then going out to organizations and businesses and explaining, ‘This is what we’re trying to do. Would you like to donate on our behalf?’” Lola also engaged in this practice as she described:

I’m still on a weekly basis I have to sell something. There is an idea, especially as a [specific professional position], you’re constantly trying to tell people who think they know everything how to – basically introduce them to new ideas and try to get their buy in on things. I learned that with my capstone project.

Olivia echoed this concept of garnering “buy in” when she stated, “thinking about collaborative leadership class, being able to pull people in on a common vision and trying to talk about – especially for the [professional organization].” Reese referenced a specific instance when she engaged in Inspire a Shared Vision, while helping someone at work. Describing this instance, she stated, “then trying to give her a vision of different futures that were possible for herself career-wise.” Reese further captured engagement in the practice of Inspire a Shared

Vision stating, “So much is creating a vision, creating community, building consensus. That’s what I do all the time...” The qualitative data provided a baseline that Empower Leaders alumni do engage in Inspire a Shared Vision, and the upcoming section containing quantitative data will corroborate this reality, while providing additional information regarding frequency.

### **Challenge the Process**

This practice involves looking outside of the known information the group possesses to discover better ways of doing things. Willing to leave the status quo behind, leaders engaged in Challenge the Process are not content with doing things the way they have always been done. This practice involves advancing the group through taking risks and finding incremental steps to success (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15). The LPI includes six behavior statements tied to Challenge the Process, and these statements were also utilized to code instances when alumni engaged in this practice at work. Empower Leaders alumni do engage in behaviors associated with Inspire a Shared Vision at work.

Britney described looking outside of the known information her team possessed as she Challenged the Process. She said, “so in my current team, there’s a bunch of [specific professional position], but we don’t have all the answers, and so we have to reach out to people in the community or youth in the community.” Will also believed in the importance of seeking outside information stating, “So, for me, it’s educating myself by asking the questions, by researching, by placing myself strategically around the community to be able to engage and

learn...” Britney Challenged the Process with her colleagues as she sought to leave the status quo behind.

So, I had to bring that up here in a staff meeting because they kept wanting to separate the two. And so, we have a [specific population] that want to work, but they were trying to keep the [specific group] at [specific college] separate from the community members, and I was like, “That’s not the right way to go. You need to bridge that gap so that [specific group] know that people in [specific city] actually care, and the people that live in [specific city] have the opportunity to engage with [specific group] that they may never even engage with.”

Britney was not satisfied with the approach of her colleagues and expressed what she believed to be a better way forward. Similarly, Will wanted to see change in the way a specific population was being isolated in a larger community. Will described acting to create change as he stated:

I purposely went to communities and to offices to build collaboration and to have conversations about how we work together to better connect our [specific population] to each other because the [specific group] often would just like get siloed off into our community and not go to other people because they didn’t feel comfortable.

Sarah best captured Challenge the Process as she consistently pushed to see changes in a process that created inefficiencies for her organization. She believed she honed these behaviors working on her capstone project as she stated:

And then something that I think stemmed – especially like doing the leadership capstone project of process improvement within the [specific program] – I’ve seen that I do it everywhere I go now. So, with [professional position] I did. I changed it to electronic

[specific process]. We were doing it by paper, which is so manual. So, I convinced our area to do it in electronic form. So, it definitely saves paper, saves time, and I think it's easier for [specific population].

To enact this change Sarah had to persistently take risks in order to leave the status quo behind. She further expounded on her determination as she Challenged the Process, stating:

So, I brought it up during a couple of the meetings and I definitely met resistance at first like, 'Oh, we've tried that' or 'How would it work with signatures?' So, every obstacle that they brought up, I made sure that I had a solution for and then I slowly started getting people on my side because there was another [specific professional] group that they were doing it... She said, 'Oh, it's way too complicated.' I was like, 'No. We have a much more simple solution' and then it also kind of saved money because they wanted individual scanners for everybody...

Sarah typified the behaviors associated with Challenge the Process as she was not satisfied with the way her organization had always completed their work. Her persistence resulted in savings for her organization as well as increased efficiency. She also described bringing this desire for improvement into her new position, stating, "And then I did the same thing at the [new specific position]. Even though I'm still super new, it made it easy for me to – I guess it's just a fresh set of eyes just to see an improvement." The qualitative data provided a baseline that Empower Leaders alumni do engage in Challenge the Process, and the upcoming section containing quantitative data will corroborate this reality, while providing additional information regarding frequency.

### **Enable Others to Act**

Leaders understand that they cannot be successful doing the work alone. They must build effective teams by developing relationships and trust. Encouraging collaboration, the leader seeks to empower and improve others while giving followers the autonomy to do their work (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: “Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15). The LPI includes six behavior statements tied to Enable Others to Act, and these statements were also utilized to code instances when alumni engaged in this practice at work. Empower Leaders alumni do engage in behaviors associated with Enable Others to Act at work, and this practice was most prevalent in the qualitative data when compared to other practices.

Britney engaged in this practice as she quickly formed relationships with her colleagues. She said, “having only been there 10-11 months in my job, and being able to do a whole program, and also work very closely with people that I had just met less than a year.” She further exhibited behaviors tied to Enable Others to Act as she pulled others into work as she stated:

And then coordinating what actually went on, so reaching out to the [specific] department, ‘Hey, can you come do a presentation on how [specific topic] is hitting this population?’ or getting different organizations to come and speak about the services that they offer within the [specific area].

Karis practiced Enable Others to Act as she described keeping her volunteers engaged, stating, “And I have all of these volunteers who are chomping at the bit to serve, and so finding other places for them to serve and redirect their energy, and making sure that they stay

engaged...” Lola described empowering others at work as she explained her approach to decision making.

So I like to get everybody’s perspective and then make a decision and I feel that once you have the buy-in from everybody that decision’s a lot easier to implement. And that I kinda got through the Empower Leaders program.

Will also empowered others in decision making as he tried to learn from and engage a specific population in programming he was developing. Describing this process, he recalled:

And so I ask the [specific population] the questions. ‘What do you need right now? What’s going on with you? What’s happening? How do we work together to plan programs that your peers will actually enjoy being engaged in and want to come to?’

These types of questions Will utilized build trust, and empowers others to participate.

Reese best captured the spirit of Enable Others to Act as her description highlighted the concept that leaders cannot achieve extraordinary results acting in isolation. She was willing to concede control, and trust others to do the work. She stated:

As a [specific organization], we didn’t have a lot of resources. I constantly had [specific] volunteers coming in. I would enlist them. ‘Can you help me with this project?’ Other [colleagues] were like ‘How do you do that? How do you let them into your space?’ I’m like ‘I learned to delegate.’ They’re like “I can never give up that control. I can never let them in my [specific space].’ I’m like ‘But otherwise, the things that I want to do aren’t going to get done because I can’t do it in my own power.’

Interestingly, Reese enabled others beyond the capacity that was comfortable for her colleagues. The statement, “I can’t do it in my own power” is the mantra that undergirds Enable Others to Act. The qualitative data provided a baseline that Empower Leaders alumni do engage

in Enable Others to Act, and the upcoming section containing quantitative data will corroborate this reality, while providing additional information regarding frequency.

### **Encourage the Heart**

Encourage the heart is typified by the celebration of success, while paying homage to the groups' deeply held beliefs. The leader shows appreciation to individuals who deserve recognition, and understands the group needs encouragement in order to continue pressing forward (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). This practice includes the following two commitments: "Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community" (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 15). The LPI includes six behavior statements tied to Encourage the Heart, and these statements were also utilized to code instances when alumni engaged in this practice at work. Empower Leaders alumni do engage in behaviors associated with Encourage the Heart at work, however, this practice was the least prevalent in the qualitative data when compared to other practices. Reese engaged in this practice as she sought to encourage individuals at work through conversations surrounding disabilities. She said, "Encouraging [specific population]. 'Yes, I know it's discouraging to hear that your [specific person] has an intellectual disability. I know that the future may seem limited but it's not. They have these strengths.'" Sarah best captured the essence of Encourage the Heart when she stated:

so, with all of the Empower Leaders experience, you kind of become a cheerleader because with the volunteer environment, everyone was just so accepting and you learn the enthusiasm piece because a lot of times it wasn't fun – especially with the [specific state]. Everyone was freezing. You're all gross, but you manage to be happy about it and to be positive. So, I think that's another thing that I've taken at this work –

especially in some of the trainings. It's grueling and everyone can be negative because it's just not fun, but you learn to point out the positives and encourage the group. That's definitely something I learned from the Empower Leaders.

Sarah believed she "became a cheerleader" through her alternative break experiences tied to the Empower Leaders program. She continued to cheerlead and encouraged her colleagues through trainings that were "just not fun." The qualitative data provided a baseline that Empower Leaders alumni do engage in Encourage the Heart, and the upcoming section containing quantitative data will corroborate this reality, while providing additional information regarding frequency.

### **Quantitative Findings and the Five Practices**

Regarding the quantitative data, the researcher utilized two approaches to review how frequently alumni engaged in the five practices. The first approach involved utilizing the frequency scale found in the instrument, and the second approach entailed comparing the participants' average scores to the available normative data. For the first approach, the LPI itself measured how frequently respondents engaged in six behavior statements tied to each of the five practices for a total of 30 behavior statements. The instrument included a 10-point frequency scale (1= Almost Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Seldom, 4 = Once in a While, 5 = Occasionally, 6 = Sometimes, 7 = Fairly Often, 8 = Usually, 9 = Very frequently, and 10 = Almost Always). The highest score for a single practice is 60 points, which is calculated by adding up the frequency score total for six of the behavior statements tied to that individual practice. The research question can be addressed using this same scale by dividing the average individual score for each practice by six and rounding appropriately. This generates a frequency statement, from the

instrument frequency scale, that is directly associated with the average score for each practice.

Table 5 below displays this first approach.

Table 5  
*Participant LPI Averages, Standard Deviation, and Frequency Rating*

	<u>Model</u>	<u>Inspire</u>	<u>Challenge</u>	<u>Enable</u>	<u>Encourage</u>
Participants Mean Scores	47.125	39.75	47.875	49.25	46.375
(SD)	(5.743)	(11.997)	(5.462)	(8.189)	(5.655)
Frequency Statement	Usually	Fairly Often	Usually	Usually	Usually

*Note.* N = 8; 60 = highest possible score

The scores above represent the average score for the eight participants in each of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. Enable Others to Act represented the highest score among the alumni with a score of 49.25/60, while Inspire a Shared Vision represented the lowest score of 39.75/60. According to the average frequency scale statement, the participants usually engaged in four of the five practices, and fairly often engaged in Inspire a Shared Vision. In summary, Empower Leaders alumni usually or fairly often engaged in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

The second approach for reviewing how frequently alumni engaged in the five practices was to compare the participant average scores to normative data. Barry Posner provided information from the LPI normative database directly to the researcher (personal communication, November 30, 2018). The database included over 45,000 leader scores from an age range of 24-32, which is like the range found among the participants in this study. Table 6 below includes a comparison of the participants' average scores for each of the practices with the available normative data.

Table 6  
*Participant LPI Average Comparison with Normative Data of Age Range 24-32*

	<u>Model</u>	<u>Inspire</u>	<u>Challenge</u>	<u>Enable</u>	<u>Encourage</u>
Participants Mean Scores (SD)	47.125 (5.75)	39.75 (11.99)	47.875 (5.46)	49.25 (8.19)	46.375 (5.66)
Normative Data Scores (SD)	44.72 (7.799)	41.21 (10.043)	43.1 (8.477)	49 (6.475)	44.09 (9.502)

*Note.* N = 8 for participants; N = 45,936 for normative data; 60 = highest possible score

The participants' average scores were higher than the normative data scores for Model the Way, Challenge the Process, and Encourage the Heart with the largest difference found in Challenge the Process. Enable Others to Act contained a negligible difference, and the participants' average score was lower than the normative data score for Inspire a Shared Vision. The participants scored higher or the same on four of the five practices when compared to the normative data.

A more complete picture of the comparison with normative data is seen when every individual participant score is compared with the normative scores. One participant scored much lower than the other participants which significantly altered the participants' average scores. Table 7 below mitigates this issue without removing this participant's data. The table intentionally excludes pseudonyms to further protect confidentiality. To this point the researcher has taken significant measures to remove any identifying information. However, out of an abundance of caution, the researcher believed the scores were personal enough in nature to warrant the additional measure of excluding the pseudonyms associated with individual scores. This measure was applied in case any information provided allows the participants or others from the program to make unforeseen connections that identify a participant. Table 7 below

includes every individual score for each participant, and an asterisk is placed next to every score that exceeds the normative data average.

Table 7

*Individual Participant LPI Scores Compared with Normative Averages (24-32 age range)*

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Model</u>	<u>Inspire</u>	<u>Challenge</u>	<u>Enable</u>	<u>Encourage</u>
Participant 1	51*	34	46*	55*	47*
Participant 2	49*	41	53*	56*	42
Participant 3	46*	48*	44*	50*	53*
Participant 4	35	13	40	32	39
Participant 5	43	43*	43	43	40
Participant 6	52*	43*	53*	50*	47*
Participant 7	50*	44*	49*	52*	49*
Participant 8	51*	52*	55*	56*	54*

*Note.* Asterisks above identify an individual score above the normative average

The individual scores revealed that Participant 4 was an outlier with lower scores for all five practices, and this was especially the case for the score of 13 found in Inspire a Shared Vision. Table 7 shows that most of the individual participant scores were above the normative averages for the 24-32 age range. There were 48 total individual participant scores, and 36 of these scores were above the normative average. Seventy five percent of the individual scores were above the normative average. In most cases, the Empower Leaders alumni engaged more frequently in the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership when compared to the normative data.

### **Mixed Methods and the Five Practices**

Collectively, the qualitative data and quantitative data revealed that the participants frequently engaged in the five practices at work. The alumni discussed specific instances when they utilized the five practices at work, and some tied this usage to behaviors learned while in the Empower Leaders program. These qualitative data were corroborated by the quantitative data. The LPI scores revealed that the alumni usually engaged in four of the five practices, and fairly often engaged in Inspire a Shared Vision. Enable Others to Act was most prominently found in

the qualitative data, and interestingly, this was also the highest average LPI score (49.25). Table 8 below represents a summary of the qualitative and quantitative data together.

Table 8

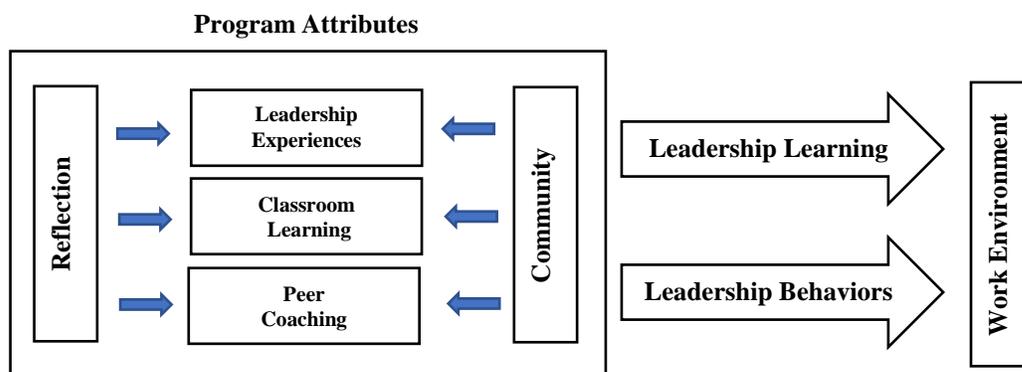
*Qualitative and Quantitative Data Tied to The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*

Practice	QUAN Result Participant Mean	QUAN Comparison Normative Data	QUAL Result Participant Response
Model (SD)	47.125 (5.75)	44.72 (7.799)	<p>“I always go back – especially in my current job – it’s all about the values I bring to the workplace. Values are constantly brought up.”</p> <p>“So, definitely lead by example because you have to show the people that you’re leading that you’re willing to do it and that’s kind of how I see in my job too.”</p>
Inspire (SD)	39.75 (11.99)	41.21 (10.043)	<p>“...being able to pull people in on a common vision.”</p> <p>“So much is creating a vision, creating community, building consensus. That’s what I do all the time, reconciling different viewpoints, which I started learning in my leadership roles.”</p>
Challenge (SD)	47.875 (5.46)	43.1 (8.477)	<p>“...it’s educating myself by asking the questions, by researching, by placing myself strategically around the community to be able to engage and learn.”</p> <p>“I changed it to electronic [specific process]. We were doing it by paper, which is so manual. So, I convinced our area to do it in electronic form.”</p>
Enable (SD)	49.25 (8.19)	49 (6.475)	<p>“So, you have to go to the people that things will affect, and so just being able to work across programs or disciplines and collaborate with a lot of people to get your work done.”</p> <p>“I like to get everybody’s perspective and then make a decision and I feel that once you have the buy-in from everybody that decision’s a lot easier to implement.”</p>
Encourage (SD)	46.375 (5.66)	44.09 (9.502)	<p>“Encouraging [specific population]. ‘Yes, I know it’s discouraging to hear that your [specific person] has an intellectual disability. I know that the future may seem limited but it’s not.’ They have these strengths.”</p> <p>“...but you learn to point out the positives and encourage the group.”</p>

*Note.* N = 8 participants; N = 45,936 normative data (24-32 age); 60 = highest possible score

**Overarching Research Question: What is the perceived value of an undergraduate leadership program for alumni in their professional career?**

The findings support, through the addressed research sub-questions, that alumni participants highly valued the Empower Leaders program, and the program continues to have value in their professional career. Alumni described specific program attributes that they believed to be most valuable including leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection. Every participant described specific leadership learning that had transferred from the program into their current work environment. Themes that emerged from this transferred leadership learning included a leading others cluster, a leading-self cluster, and a separate theme of experiential capital. The leading others cluster included themes of collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, and negotiating conflict. The leading-self cluster included themes of strengths awareness, emotional intelligence awareness, and leadership confidence. Finally, qualitative data and quantitative data revealed that Empower Leaders alumni were engaged in leadership behaviors tied to The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership in their work environment. Figure 3 below is a final conceptual framework that summarizes how the program continues to provide value to alumni in their professional careers.



*Figure 3.* Conceptualization of alumni' perceived value of leadership program

The conceptualization in figure 3 begins with the framework found in figure 2, which showed how the five program attributes identified as being valuable to alumni hold together in practice. Intentional reflection and the learning community were found to be embedded within the leadership experiences, classroom learning, and peer coaching. These attributes together fostered the environment for leadership learning and leadership behavior development to take place within the Empower Leaders program. As described in the definitions of key terms, leadership behaviors are actions that are in alignment with The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. Leadership learning includes any items learned regarding leadership knowledge, skills, self-awareness or abilities that are not explicitly tied to The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. In figure 3, the arrows containing “leadership learning” and “leadership behaviors” represent the transference to the work environment. The value provided to Empower Leaders alumni in their professional careers is found in this transfer of leadership behaviors and leadership learning into the work environment. The findings supported that participants did indeed transfer specific leadership learning and leadership behaviors into their work environments from the program. This transference led to a high valuation of the Empower Leaders program by alumni.

## Chapter Summary

The following attributes of the Empower Leaders program had the most perceived value for program alumni: leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection. Intentional reflection and the learning community were found to be embedded within the leadership experiences, classroom learning, and peer coaching attributes. Based on the findings, Empower Leaders alumni were effectively transferring leadership learning from the program into their work environments. This transference emerged across two larger clusters of leading others and leading-self. The leading others cluster included themes of collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, and negotiating conflict. The leading-self cluster included themes of strengths awareness, emotional intelligence awareness, and leadership confidence. Alumni also transferred experiential capital from the program into their work environments. A couple alumni believed the program could be improved by focusing content more on future work or employment, and two other participants stated an alumni group connected to Empower Leaders is missing from the program. Finally, the qualitative and quantitative data together revealed that Empower Leaders alumni were frequently engaged in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership to some degree.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The mission statements of many colleges include a call to develop future leaders prepared for active citizenship and professional vocation (Council for the Advancement of Standards [CAS] in Higher Education, 2012). Additionally, employers are seeking new graduates with leadership skills displayed on their resumes (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016). This has led to the proliferation of leadership programming being developed at institutions of higher education. The International Leadership Association's program directory revealed that there are over 1,600 programs in the United States involving various disciplines that grant either a certificate or some type of degree, both graduate and undergraduate, involving leadership (2017).

Leadership educators and researchers have been completing program assessments and exploring the factors that contribute to the leadership development of undergraduates. However, most studies have only assessed the leadership development of students actively on campus. There is limited understanding of how leadership learning and behaviors are transferring or not transferring into the professional work environments of alumni. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore alumni' valuation of an undergraduate leadership program by gaining an understanding of what leadership learning and leadership behaviors have transferred into their work environment. Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984) and transformational leadership, as advanced by Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (2014), were utilized as theoretical frameworks for this study.

The study included eight alumni from a large university in the southeastern United States who completed a co-curricular, four-year leadership development program. A semi-structured

interview was conducted with the participants, and each participant completed the Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) to determine the frequency with which they engaged in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. This information was collected in response to the following overarching research question: What is the perceived value of an undergraduate leadership program for alumni in their professional career? To explore this question, the following sub-questions further guided this study:

1. What attributes of the program have the most perceived value for program alumni?
2. What leadership learning effectively transfers into the work environments of program alumni?
3. What additional leadership learning would have been beneficial that was not included in the program?
4. How frequently do alumni who completed an undergraduate leadership program engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership?

The previous chapters included a review of the literature, a detailed description of the research design, data analysis, and findings from the data. This chapter will begin with an interpretation of the findings that will seek to align the findings of this study with the literature related to leadership education. The chapter will then transition to the implications of the findings, limitations, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The interpretation of the findings will connect the findings from the previous chapter with the literature reviewed in chapter two. The findings addressed an overarching research question and four sub-questions. Data analysis yielded multiple themes that addressed each of

the research questions. This section will be structured around each research question and the themes that emerged addressing these questions.

### **Valued Attributes of Leadership Programming**

To answer research sub-question one, five primary themes emerged from the data that alumni believed to be the most valuable attributes of the program including leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection. Furthermore, the data showed that intentional reflection as well as the learning community were found to be embedded in the other three attributes. These findings agreed with Eich's (2008) grounded theory study, which explored attributes of high-quality leadership programs and revealed 16 program attributes that led to student learning and leadership development including building a learning community, students learning from each other, forming smaller groups for learning and community building purposes, reflection, and opportunities to apply learning through experiences. A more thorough exploration of each valuable attribute theme in the findings reveals additional linkages to the literature.

**Leadership experiences.** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni highly valued the experiential components in the program including the requirement to hold leadership positions on campus, service requirements, requirement to attend alternative break trips, leadership retreats, and other action-oriented components. These types of experiences are valuable for undergraduate leadership development (Boettcher & Gansemar-Topf, 2015; Burbank et al., 2015; Buschlen & Warner, 2014; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; Gallagher et al., 2014; Kelley, 2008, Sessa et al., 2014; Soesbe, 2012). Many participants highly valued leadership retreats or alternative break trips and tied their leadership learning to these experiences. This is consistent with Eich's (2008) findings that high-quality leadership programs

include experiential elements such as leadership retreat experiences and community service. Similar to alternative breaks attended by the participants, students that participated in a disaster relief trip experienced leadership learning tied to the Social Change Model (SCM) framework of individual values, group values, and community values (Buschlen & Warner, 2014). The literature also provided an example of students being able to articulate their leadership learning and having a more thorough understanding of their leadership identity through participating in a kayaking training trip (Boettcher & Gansemar-Topf, 2015).

Empower Leaders alumni also referenced leadership learning that occurred through active service with local non-profits, and similarly Dugan and Komives (2010) found that community service was a significant predictor on six of the eight SCM leadership values. Also, seniors in a nursing management course experienced significant gains in each of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership after executing a public health fair as a part of the course. Through an exploration of how alumni from an undergraduate leadership program apply their learning at work, Soesbe (2012) found that experiential learning such as service-learning, service projects, and service trips led to significant leadership development.

Finally, Empower Leaders alumni described the value of holding various leadership positions on campus as required by the program, and this is consistent with the findings of Gallagher et al. (2014), which showed that leadership experiences on campus were tied to student gains in four of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. These gains increased when students engaged in multiple leadership positions, and interestingly, the findings revealed that each Empower Leaders participant held between three to seven student leadership positions while in college. This connection to the literature is further bolstered by a qualitative study, which revealed that taking a first leadership position or taking on a higher leadership position on

campus accounted for two of the top five key leadership development events in the lives of college students (Sessa et al., 2014).

**Learning community.** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni highly valued the relationships formed through the program and the learning community. This included relationships with peers and mentor relationships with administrators of the program. These findings are consistent with multiple studies that revealed the importance of a vibrant learning community for effective leadership learning (Campbell et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives 2007, 2010; Eich, 2008; Fritz & Guthrie, 2017; Odom, 2015).

Participant alumni stated that their peer relationships continued to have value after graduation and community in the program was tied to their leadership learning, which is aligned with research that has shown small classroom sizes in leadership courses have led to more fruitful leadership learning as a result of peer bonding allowing for richer discussions (Fritz & Guthrie, 2017; Odom, 2015). Additionally, four attributes of high-quality leadership programs included a supportive culture, small groups, one-on-one relationships, and a diverse group (Eich, 2008). Socio-cultural conversations were a strong predictor across all eight SCM leadership outcomes (Dugan & Komives, 2010), and these discussions typically occur within a safe and bonded learning community

The findings also supported that mentor relationships with faculty or staff tied to the program were perceived as being highly valuable for alumni, and this is congruent with the findings of Campbell et al. (2012), which showed that undergraduate mentorship, when isolated from other variables, does have an impact on the leadership development of students.

Additionally, faculty mentors were a top predictor of almost all SCM leadership values (Dugan & Komives, 2007). From the alumni lens, graduates of the Uniformed Service University

identified mentor relationships as one of a few important factors that contributed to their leadership development (Dong et al., 2012), and a few Empower Leaders alumni echoed this sentiment.

**Classroom learning.** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni highly valued the learning that occurred in the classroom during the program, and this learning has continued value for alumni in their work environment. Engaging in experiences alone is insufficient for leadership development and is best coupled with the formal instruction (Burbank et al., 2015; Romsa et al., 2017; Rosch, 2015; Sessa et al., 2014). Coursework or formal leadership development programs were considered key leadership development events in the lives of undergraduate student leaders, which led to the conclusion that “student leaders need to also engage in activities that allow them to formally learn leadership theories and practice through curricular and formal programs...” (Sessa et al., 2014, p. 20). Additional studies revealed that students in service-learning or team project experiences did not have leadership development gains when these experiences failed to include formal leadership content (Romsa et al., 2017; Rosch, 2015). Finally, undergraduate students linked their leadership behavior increases to the formal instruction of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership as course content within a service-learning project (Burbank et al., 2015). Empower Leaders participants received formal leadership content in either three or four non-credit leadership courses depending on when they finished the program and described transferring leadership learning from the coursework into their work environments.

**Peer coaching.** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni believed peer coaching within the program was highly valuable, and participants experienced this attribute of the program from the positional role of coach. Coaches met together in preparation for leading

small groups of freshmen in the program through leadership modules. One attribute of high-quality leadership programs included forming smaller groups within a program to facilitate learning and community bonding (Eich, 2008). Smaller classroom sizes have also been associated with effective leadership learning (Fritz & Guthrie, 2017; Odom, 2015). The peer coaching described by Empower Leaders alumni included these smaller group dynamics shown to be important in the literature. Peer mentoring influences student development in two of the SCM leadership values including commitment and citizenship (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Limited research exists surrounding the leadership gains from the positional role of mentor or peer coach within leadership programming.

**Intentional reflection.** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni highly valued intentional reflection that was incorporated throughout the program. This included both individual reflection and group discussions. Interestingly, reflection is an integral component of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) that was chosen as a theoretical framework for this study (Kolb, 1984). The theory, which involves the transformation of experiences into knowledge, contains four modes including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Reflection is most clearly seen in the reflective observation and abstract conceptualization modes. Reflective observation is the reflection on concrete experiences while bringing multiple perspective to bear, and abstract conceptualization entails developing theories that integrate ideas rooted in reflection. Reflection is inherent to ELT and may be why this learning theory is utilized in many leadership learning studies (Burbank et al., 2015; Eich, 2008; Facca-Miess, 2015; White & Guthrie, 2016).

Reflective activities such as journals, quiet pondering of questions and reflective dialogue have been considered an attribute of high-quality leadership programs (Eich, 2008). Reflective

instructors, a reflective culture, and discussion-based courses have been shown to enhance leadership learning (White & Guthrie, 2016). Additionally, students in leadership courses believe that reflection and group discussions are important to the leadership learning process (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013; Odom, 2015). This further explains why discussions and reflective journals are among the top 10 instructional practices of leadership educators (Jenkins, 2013). Finally, alumni of an undergraduate leadership program from a liberal arts college frequently described the importance of deep reflection in their program through discussion, journaling, and written papers (Soesbe, 2012). Similarly, Empower Leaders alumni expressed the value they placed on intentional reflection found in the program.

### **Transfer of Leadership Learning**

To address research sub-question two, two large clusters of applied leadership learning emerged from the data and each included multiple themes. The first was the leading others cluster which included the following themes: collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, and negotiating conflict. The second was the leading-self cluster which included the following themes: strengths awareness, emotional intelligence (EI) awareness, and leadership confidence. Applying experiential capital from the program in the work environment also emerged as a standalone theme.

Leadership learning has been shown to transfer from a programmatic structure designed for working professionals into the work environment (Brue & Brue, 2016; Coloma et al., 2012; Patton et al., 2013; Purdy, 2016). However, this transfer of leadership learning remains largely unexplored with alumni from undergraduate leadership programs as most studies assessed leadership learning while students were actively on campus. Though limited, there is some evidence that leadership learning effectively transfers from a structured undergraduate leadership

program into work environments (Soesbe, 2012). Further exploration of the leading others cluster, leading-self cluster, and the experiential capital theme in the findings reveals additional connections to the literature.

**Leading others.** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni have effectively transferred leadership learning from the program which allows them to effectively collaborate with others in their work environments. More specifically this learning included the themes of collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness and negotiating conflict. Interestingly, alumni from an undergraduate leadership program at a liberal arts college expressed they had gained knowledge in the following similar areas: collaboration, diversity, understanding others, and communication (Soesbe, 2012).

**Collaboration.** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni learned the general ability to collaborate with others in the program, and they apply this skill in their work environment. In terms of leadership development occurring on campuses, engagement in student organizations has been associated with higher scores on the SCM leadership value of collaboration (Dugan & Komives, 2010). According to Bond & Sterrett (2014), holding a leadership position in a specific student organization contributed to learning to work in teams. Additionally, off-campus volunteering structured into a leadership development program contributed to relationships skill building in undergraduates (Strawn et al., 2017). Finally, alumni of a leadership development program for surgeons believed they had improved team-building skills as a result of the program (Pradarelli et al., 2016). Empower Leaders were highly engaged on campus both in leadership positions and service in the community, completing 125 hours of service as part of the program. These experiences are associated with an increased

ability to collaborate with others (Bond & Sterrett, 2014; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Strawn et al., 2017), thus it is unsurprising that this theme emerged among Empower Leaders alumni.

***Leveraging differences.*** Alumni learned to leverage differences on a team; this includes effectively working with people who are different on a team and seeing these differences as an asset to be leveraged. These differences included strengths, weaknesses, leadership styles, and personality types. Alumni of a leadership program at a liberal arts college recognized that they gained knowledge in understanding others, and some directly recognized the importance of having differences on a team (Soesbe, 2012). One participant from Soesbe's (2012) study stated, "So it's very important to be conscious of the fact that people are different, but everyone has strengths, and it's good that people are different than me" (p. 174). Another participant learned "how to deal with people and understanding how people have different strengths" (Soesbe, 2012, 174). Empower Leaders alumni echoed these statements which provided evidence supporting the leveraging differences theme.

***Communication.*** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni acquired and apply communication skills at work including verbal communication, listening, or presentation skills. Communication was the most cited learned leadership skill from undergraduate student leaders who served in an honorary professional organization, and listening was an additional learned leadership skill developed through this leadership role (Bond & Sterrett, 2014). Similarly, student employees who attended an outdoor recreation training trip better understood the importance of communication through active listening and empathy (Boettcher & Gansemar-Topf, 2015). Finally, alumni of an undergraduate leadership program at a liberal arts college stated they gained effective communication skills through course discussions, written assignment and presentations (Soesbe, 2012). Empower Leaders alumni engaged in similar activities

described in these studies while in the program through holding leadership positions, traveling on alternative break trips, and through classroom presentations and discussions. Therefore, these experiences can likely be tied to alumni actively applying communications skills garnered from the program in their work environments.

***Diversity awareness.*** Empower Leaders alumni learned diversity awareness through the program and apply this learning at work. This included awareness surrounding race, gender, age, different cultures, income, nationality, disabilities, gender sexual minority identity or other factors. A very similar theme emerged from alumni of an undergraduate leadership program at a liberal arts college who described having greater awareness surrounding diversity (Soesbe, 2012). Fritz and Guthrie (2017) found that students in an undergraduate leadership certificate program believed diversity in the classroom was important for learning and clarifying their own values. They also recognized their program had a supportive environment in which differing values were respected. Additionally, one of Eich's (2008) attributes of high-quality leadership programs included engaged students from diverse backgrounds in communities that challenge each other in supportive ways. The findings showed that Empower Leaders alumni described these types of exchanges with a diverse group of students, which helped enhance their awareness of diversity.

***Negotiating conflict.*** Empower Leaders alumni learned skills surrounding negotiating conflict or about conflict-styles through experiences tied to the program that they have applied in their work environments, and this is consistent with Rosch and Caza's (2012) findings that participation in short-term leadership programming resulted in higher Controversy with Civility scores. Negotiating conflict is closely related to the SCM leadership value of Controversy with Civility that is assessed through the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS) found in

many studies involving undergraduate leadership learning. Undergraduate student engagement in socio-cultural conversations, mentor relationships, community service, and moderate leadership training has been associated with higher scores in Controversy with Civility (Dugan & Komives, 2010) all of which Empower Leaders alumni engaged in through requirements of the program.

**Leading-self.** Empower Leaders alumni gained more self-awareness from the program and an internal capacity to lead in their work environment. This second cluster of leadership learning applied in the work environment included the following themes: strengths awareness, emotional intelligence awareness, and leadership confidence. Multiple studies surrounding undergraduate leadership learning displayed results in which students learned more about themselves or became more confident as leaders (Bond & Sterrett, 2014; Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013; Eich, 2008; Soesbe, 2012; Soria et al., 2015).

**Strengths awareness.** Empower Leaders alumni gained an awareness of their own personal strengths through experiences tied to the program which they apply at work. This learning was primarily delivered through a collaborative leadership course that included a specific assessment, CliftonStrengths for Students, that allowed students to discover their individual talent themes. Strengths awareness, measured by this same assessment, has been shown to be important for leadership development in first-year students (Soria et al., 2015). Alumni from an undergraduate leadership program at a liberal arts institution also took the same strengths assessment while in their program (Soesbe, 2012). Alumni of this program believed this assessment and other similar assessments led to greater self-awareness and a better understanding of the way they lead others; Empower Leaders alumni described a similar outcome, which supported the strengths awareness theme in this study.

***Emotional intelligence awareness.*** The findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni have applied emotional intelligence (EI) learning from the program at work or an awareness of their own EI from the program has value in their work environment. Much of this awareness derived from learning about their own EI through taking a specific assessment in a hybrid leadership course in Empower Leaders. One of Eich's (2008) attributes of a high-quality leadership program included self-assessment tools that were taken, explored, and understood by students. Empower Leaders alumni engaged in this practice through taking an EI assessment in a hybrid course that allowed them to unpack its meaning in the context of a job, leadership position, or internship.

Limited research exists surrounding undergraduate leadership development through EI although this has been explored in outdoor leadership education with college-age students. Students that attended a three to four-week outdoor expedition as part of an outdoor leadership certificate program experienced an increase in EI levels (Hayashi & Ewert, 2013). Similarly, incoming freshmen students who participated in a five to eight-day outdoor orientation program experienced some gains in EI (Schwartz & Belknap, 2017), and these outdoor trips may be similar in some ways to the experiential components of the Empower Leaders program with the greatest parallel being the required alternative break trip.

***Leadership confidence.*** Empower Leaders alumni believed the program gave them confidence to lead and have carried this confidence into their work environments. Alumni from an undergraduate leadership program at a liberal arts college also expressed having additional confidence as a leader due to participating in the program (Soesbe, 2012). Similarly, alumni of a leadership program designed for professional women in the workplace reported enhanced leadership confidence, and an enhanced capacity to lead others (Brue & Brue, 2016).

Undergraduate student leaders who served in an honorary professional organization stated that a benefit of serving in their leadership position was increased confidence as a leader (Bond & Sterrett, 2014), and, interestingly, the findings showed that the Empower Leaders alumni participants held between three to seven student leadership positions each.

**Experiential capital.** Empower Leaders alumni had experiences tied to the program that continued to be directly applicable in their work environment. In many cases this was a practical skill such as creating a flyer or writing a grant, and in some cases, it was a more complex experience such as designing an experiential program. Similarly, student employees who attended an outdoor recreation training trip garnered practical professional skills such as planning and organization (Boettcher & Gansemer-Topf, 2015). Alumni of a leadership program designed for professional women in the workplace believed the program enhanced their professional skills (Brue & Brue, 2016). Finally, undergraduate student leaders who served in an honorary professional organization believed they learned transferable professional skills as well as gained tangible skills such as planning and multi-tasking (Bond & Sterrett, 2014) much like the tangible skills Empower Leaders alumni garnered from experiences in the program.

### **Alumni Recommendations**

In support of research sub-question three, all participants were able to provide a specific program recommendation they believed was missing from the program except for one participant. There were varying responses with limited conceptual overlap across the data, but two themes did emerge including alumni group and career focus. Two participants suggested that the program should form some type of alumni group that keeps alumni connected with each other and potentially provide the group with additional leadership learning through contact with the program. Two other participants stated the program could have had a more intentional career

focus with content more geared toward future work as opposed to focusing on service or community engagement. Other program recommendations included: more learning focused on conflict negotiation, a stronger focus on diversity and inclusion, and learning how to find and develop a mentor relationship.

Very few studies in the literature solicited or reported program recommendations provided by participants or alumni of leadership programs. Alumni of a leadership development program for surgeons similarly provided a wide range of program recommendations (Pradarelli et al., 2016). Some recommendations included learning more information about mentoring as well as conflict resolution, and there was also a suggestion for program alumni involvement in future programs. These recommendations interestingly mirrored some of the suggestions made by Empower Leaders alumni. Finally, alumni of the Uniformed Services University, which trains military doctors, had various program suggestions to improve leadership development in the curriculum (Dong et al., 2012). These recommendations included: treating leadership as a core competency, emphasize mentorship or role models, be clear about expectations of leaders, and provide additional training to students. The desire for learning surrounding mentorship was found in both studies and was suggested as a program recommendation for Empower Leaders.

### **The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership**

To address research sub-question four, qualitative data provided a baseline to denote that Empower Leaders alumni do engage in all five practices at work including Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. Participants provided concrete examples of engaging in these practices in their work environments. In terms of the quantitative data collected through the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), the average scores for the eight participant alumni included: Model the Way at

47.125/60, Inspire a Shared Vision at 39.75/60, Challenge the Process at 47.875/60, Enable Others to Act at 49.25/60, and Encourage the Heart at 46.375/60. Utilizing the same rating scale language found in the LPI, these scores show that the participants “usually” engage in four of the five practices, and “fairly often” practice Inspire a Shared Vision.

These scores gain additional relevance when compared to the normative LPI data set that included a similar age range of the participants ( $N = 45,936$ ; age 24-32). This comparison yielded the following results (alumni average score to normative data): Model the Way (47.125 to 44.72), Inspire a Shared Vision (39.75 to 41.21), Challenge the Process (47.875 to 43.1), Enable Other to Act (49.25 to 49), and Encourage the Heart (46.375 to 44.09). The alumni participants scored higher or the same on four of the five practices when compared to the available normative data. It is also important to note that one participant was a significant outlier that likely skewed the averages downward with low scores in each practice, and this was especially the case for Inspire a Shared Vision (scored 13/60). Findings from the quantitative and qualitative data together revealed that Empower Leaders alumni were frequently engaged in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership to some degree.

The literature points to several collegiate experiences that have been linked to leadership behavior development gains specifically in the five practices (Burbank et al., 2015; Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013; Foli et al., 2014; Gallagher et al., 2014; Posner, 2009). These collegiate experiences mirror many of the experiences required by the Empower Leaders program that were described by the alumni participants, and perhaps this link may help explain the findings that Empower Leaders alumni were frequently engaged in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership to some degree. An exploration of these experiences in the literature helps to reveal this connection to the findings.

First, Posner (2009) found that undergraduates that engaged in leadership programming for business students experienced significant increases in the frequency of their usage of all five practices when the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (S-LPI) was match-paired from freshmen to senior year. Additionally, the business student seniors (treatment group) were compared with non-business seniors, and the treatment group had significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) usage of four of the practices excluding Model the Way. A one-year leadership program for pharmacy students explicitly incorporated the five practices along with other content (Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013). Qualitative data from a program assessment showed that students in this program had new awareness of Model the Way and Enable Others to Act, which contributed to their capacity to serve as mentors to members of organizations they were involved with. Undergraduate leadership programming can lead to increased usage of the five practices, and alumni participants in this study were engaged in a four-year co-curricular leadership development program while in college (Empower Leaders). Furthermore, Empower Leaders incorporated The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership both in peer coaching and through coursework. Including this content is meaningful as students reflecting on their personal gains on the S-LPI believed that their leadership behaviors increased due to a better understanding of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Burbank et al., 2015).

Next, holding leadership positions while in college has been associated with higher scores in the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Gallagher et al., 2014). Students with three or more leadership positions scored higher in the majority of the practices when compared to students with only one leadership experience, and students who had no leadership experiences had lower scores (Gallagher et al., 2014). The findings showed that the Empower Leaders

alumni participants held between three to seven leadership positions each while on campus, and the program did require them to hold at least two such positions.

Finally, engaging in service or service-learning as an undergraduate has also been associated with higher scores in the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Burbank et al., 2015; Foli et al., 2014). Students in a nursing management course completed the S-LPI before and after their service experience that entailed planning as well as executing a public health fair (Foli et al., 2014). These students had significant gains in each of the five practices on the S-LPI post-test ( $p < .01$ ). In another study, students reflecting on their personal gains on the S-LPI believed that their leadership behaviors had changed due to the student-developed, service-learning projects found in their course (Burbank et al., 2015). Alumni from the Empower Leaders program were required to complete 125 service hours and served other communities on alternative break trips. However, the experiences described in these studies are perhaps most aligned with the Empower Leaders requirement to complete a capstone project. The capstone project required alumni to develop a project that had an impact on the community, could be sustained beyond their direct involvement, and was feasible with their available resources.

In summary, the findings supported that Empower Leaders alumni were frequently engaged in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership to some degree, and this is consistent with the literature surrounding collegiate experiences that have been connected with leadership behavior gains in the five practices. The collegiate experiences of leadership programming, holding leadership positions, and service-learning have been associated with student gains in the five practices. These collegiate experiences parallel many of the experiences required by the Empower Leaders program that were described by the alumni participants, and perhaps this link helps explain the findings.

## **Perceived Value**

To address the overarching research question regarding the value of an undergraduate leadership program to alumni in their work environment, the findings displayed that Empower Leaders alumni highly valued the program as it continued to have tangible value for them in their professional career, and this is closely aligned with findings from Soesbe's (2012) exploration of the lived experiences of alumni of a leadership program situated at a liberal arts college. These alumni highly valued their prior experiences in their leadership program and were utilizing leadership learning from the program at work including teamwork, diversity, communication, understanding others, mentoring, and servant leadership. Empower Leaders experienced a transference of similar leadership learning into their work environments, and several other studies showed that leadership learning can transfer from a programmatic structure into the workplace (Brue & Brue, 2012, Coloma et al., 2012; Dong et al., 2012; Pradarelli et al., 2016; Purdy, 2016). From the perspective of alumni in these studies as well as the Empower Leaders alumni, the value of leadership programs is found in the transference of leadership learning.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Limited literature exists that assesses the value of undergraduate leadership programs from the alumni perspective. Institutions of higher education frequently espouse the importance of preparing future leaders in their mission statements (CAS, 2012), and alumni are uniquely positioned to help educators determine the effectiveness of this preparation. The alumni lens in this study provides important implications for leadership educators as well as senior level administrators in higher education when developing and implementing leadership programming.

### **Implications for Leadership Educators in Higher Education**

For the purposes of this discussion, leadership educators will include anyone who is engaged in the leadership development of college students. This larger group of higher education professionals expands beyond those developing and executing formal leadership programs. An important implication to explore is that leadership educators should be mindful of the leadership program attributes that were highly valued by alumni in this study including leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection.

Leadership educators should incorporate leadership experiences or action-oriented elements within programming that allow students to practice the process of leadership or at the very least should encourage students to engage in these experiences if they are not incorporated in formal programming. Situational factors may best determine what these experiences should consist of but some experiences to consider might include: service trips, local service, engagement in extracurricular activities, student leadership positions, student employment, and leadership retreats. The findings in this study, and multiple studies corroborate the importance of leadership experiences in the leadership development of undergraduates (Boettcher & Gansemar-Topf, 2015; Burbank et al., 2015; Buschlen & Warner, 2014; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; Gallagher et al., 2014; Kelley, 2008, Sessa et al., 2014; Soesbe, 2012).

Leadership educators may easily overlook the importance of building a positive learning community within their programs. This includes creating environments that foster positive relationships among peers, and also mentor relationships with those administering the program. Larger programs may need to consider forming smaller groups` and may want to encourage students to at least identify a mentor on campus if time constraints will not permit a mentor relationship with program administrators. The alumni participants in this study highly valued the

learning community they found in the program, and literature supports the importance of a supportive community for leadership learning (Campbell et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives 2007, 2010; Eich, 2008; Fritz & Guthrie, 2017; Odom, 2015). An effort should be made to build a positive learning community within all components of leadership programs wherever possible.

The findings from this study showed that Empower Leaders alumni highly valued the leadership learning that took place in a classroom setting. The situational factors for many programs cannot support a classroom structure, but leadership educators must be careful not to neglect formal leadership learning. Leadership experiences alone are not sufficient for undergraduate leadership learning and should be coupled with some formal learning (Romsa et al., 2017; Rosch, 2015). This may take the form of workshops, meetings, online modules or other creative ways of delivering leadership learning objectives through a student-centered approach.

Empower Leaders alumni highly valued peer coaching, which consisted of upperclassmen students guiding freshmen through leadership modules in small groups. This attribute may be useful to leadership educators with larger programs as it allows for smaller groups and the creation of peer-mentor relationships. Additionally, it allows for formal leadership learning to take place and creates an experiential leadership position for the upperclassman coach. Leadership educators should consider the appropriateness of incorporating peer coaching within their programs.

Intentional reflection must not be neglected in leadership programming, and it is imperative that leadership educators find ways to incorporate reflection with their students. Reflection could be an individual practice through journaling, written assignments, and quiet pondering of questions. When debriefing experiences or engaging in a deeper understanding of

leadership content, leadership educators should also incorporate group reflection through discussion. Reflection allows students to transform experiences into learning (Kolb, 1984). The findings from this study, and the literature point to the importance of reflection for leadership learning (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013; Odom, 2015; Soesbe, 2012; White & Guthrie, 2016). An attempt should be made to embed intentional reflection into all components of leadership programs when possible.

Leadership educators should also consider assessing their programs through garnering alumni feedback. This is a useful exercise as evidenced by the insights gleaned from alumni participants in this study. Furthermore, if possible, leadership educators should make an effort to maintain alumni connections, and perhaps through a formalized alumni group. The findings from this study showed that some alumni wanted to maintain connections with each other and the program. Alumni could support leadership programming through providing feedback, becoming donors, encouraging students in their leadership development, or even becoming a mentor. Finally, when developing learning objectives, leadership educators may consider including some of the leadership learning that effectively transferred into the work environments of alumni in this study. These included collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, negotiating conflict, strengths awareness, emotional intelligence (EI) awareness, and leadership confidence.

### **Senior Level Administrators in Higher Education**

Senior level administrators in higher education should seek to develop and fund formal leadership programming. Multiple studies in the literature show that such programs, if appropriately structured, can lead to positive leadership gains for undergraduates (Chesnut & Tran-Johnson, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Posner, 2009; Rosch & Caza, 2012; Sessa et al.,

2014). Furthermore, the findings from this study provided evidence that many alumni are likely to transfer their leadership learning into work environments from these programs. If leadership programs already exist on a campus, administrators should seek to support and continue funding for these programs, while ensuring they incorporate attributes associated with high-quality leadership programs (Eich, 2009). Finally, senior level administrators should ensure that the value of these programs are being communicated externally both in student recruitment and when seeking donations.

### **Impact Statement**

Institutions of higher education continue to espouse the importance of developing future leaders, but often fail to assess the effectiveness of this leadership preparation from an alumni perspective. This study incorporated the alumni perspective in an effort to address a problem of practice of ensuring undergraduate leadership programming continues to have value for alumni in their work environments. The findings from this study may help institutions, administrators, and leadership educators develop, execute and fund leadership programming that truly prepares undergraduates for leadership beyond graduation. This study provides leadership educators with practical, empirically based information for developing effective leadership programs including program structure considerations, important attributes, and learning objectives deemed useful by alumni in the workforce.

This study also contributes to filling a gap in the literature, as most of the studies surrounding undergraduate leadership development do not include data collected from alumni. Researchers and leadership educators may use elements of the methodology as a guide when incorporating alumni input. Finally, the study could encourage others in a higher education context to value and seek alumni input when appropriate.

### **Limitation, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

This study is limited in generalizability as it explored the leadership development of alumni through a specific leadership program and institution. Causality was not considered due to the non-experimental nature of the study. Additional experiential factors after graduation could also contribute to leadership development of participants that will not be captured in this study, and these experiences post-graduation likely have an impact on the participants LPI scores. This may include additional leadership training completed post-graduation or holding significant professional leadership positions at work. The study assumes that leadership can be learned, that a self-assessment tool displays an accurate picture of leadership behaviors, and that participants were truthful in their responses.

This study did not solicit employer or supervisor feedback on the participants' engagement in leadership learning from the program or The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. The researcher chose not to incorporate the participant's employer feedback either through the completion of the LPI-Observer instrument or through interviews with co-workers or supervisors. The researcher believed this would discourage participation and anticipated that this would not be a practical approach with the limited number of possible participants.

The participants in this study only included those alumni that fully completed every portion of the program. This decision was made to ensure that participant alumni had experienced every element of the program and had engaged in all the learning objectives associated with the program. However, this also led to a pool of participants that were highly engaged in the leadership programming while on campus. The perspectives of those who only completed a portion of the program or who were passive in their engagement were likely not included in this study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study displayed the usefulness of seeking alumni insights for the enhancement of undergraduate leadership programming, and more research should be conducted that includes the alumni perspective on their experiences in leadership programs. Future studies with alumni may want to explore how these programs have impacted their personal lives, and engagement in the community. Additionally, this study assumed that alumni participants had an accurate picture of themselves, and future studies with alumni may seek to incorporate input from those that work with alumni.

The findings from this study showed that alumni highly valued five program attributes including leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection. More research is needed to further explore how leadership educators should effectively execute these attributes in practice. For instance, Eich (2008) identified 16 attributes of high-quality leadership programs, but a knowledge gap is missing on how to ensure the attributes themselves are high-quality. Best practices for implementing these attributes are needed for practitioners.

Many of the studies surrounding undergraduate leadership development utilized either the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (S-LPI) to measure usage of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership or the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) survey to assess engagement in the Social Change Model (SCM) leadership values. Future research should seek to develop additional instruments for measuring the leadership development of college students. Leadership is a complex process, and two assessments are not sufficient to cover the variety of theoretical frameworks available in leadership education. If other instruments exist for

measuring leadership outcomes for undergraduates, these should be incorporated in future leadership education studies when appropriate.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore alumni' valuation of an undergraduate leadership program by gaining an understanding of what leadership learning and leadership behaviors have transferred into their work environment. Data were collected from eight alumni who completed a four-year, co-curricular undergraduate leadership program situated at a large university in the southeastern United States. These alumni engaged in a one-hour interview and completed the LPI to assess the frequency with which they use The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. This data revealed that alumni highly valued the program, and particularly valued program attributes including the leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection. Alumni were successfully transferring leadership learning from the program into their work environments. The leadership learning that effectively transferred into work environments included themes of collaboration, leveraging differences, communication, diversity awareness, negotiation conflict, strengths awareness, emotional intelligence awareness, and leadership confidence. Alumni also transferred experiential capital from the program into their work environments. Finally, qualitative and quantitative data showed that alumni were frequently engaged in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership to some degree.

Most of the literature surrounding undergraduate leadership development focused on the leadership growth and perspective of students actively on campus. This study served to fill this gap in the literature as leadership educators and institutions can benefit from having a better grasp on the efficacy of their programs from the alumni perspective. This population is uniquely

positioned to explore if programming is appropriately preparing students to be future leaders in their communities and in their vocational pursuits. This study sought to display the value of incorporating the perspective of alumni. Practitioners, and researchers should seek alumni input when assessing programs and may consider utilizing approaches from this study.

This study further bolstered the importance of leadership educators to incorporate the attributes associated with high-quality leadership programs (Eich, 2008). This study provides support for the importance of leadership experiences, learning community, classroom learning, peer coaching, and intentional reflection. In short, leadership programming should couple formal leadership learning with deliberately designed leadership experiences while embedding intentional reflection and fostering a positive learning community. The formal leadership learning should be structured around written learning objectives that can be assessed. This study identified specific leadership learning that effectively transferred into the work environments of alumni, and leadership educators may want to consider these as they develop their learning objectives. Additionally, leadership educators may want to consider replicating or modifying elements of the Empower Leaders program where appropriate to their context. Finally, students should be challenged to engage in their personal leadership development, and leadership educators should not shirk from having high expectations of their students. We sometimes need to look at our students and say, “eat your vegetables.”

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## APPENDIX A

**Learning Objectives of Undergraduate Leadership Program**

<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</b>	
<b>Self-Leadership</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and be able to articulate the importance of self-leadership in the leadership development process</li> <li>• Explore and establish personal core values</li> <li>• Learn to set goals and objectives and to manage personal behavior according to core values</li> <li>• Recognize personal leadership style</li> <li>• Understand that leadership is a process and appreciate that role and personal style changes over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and be able to articulate the concepts of Team/Group Dynamics</li> <li>• Identify leadership strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• Recognize the value and importance of teamwork in a leadership situation</li> <li>• Learn to establish and cultivate supportive and collaborative leadership relationships</li> <li>• Develop skills to facilitate collaboration: Communication Conflict Management Building Consensus</li> </ul>
<b>Community &amp; Organizational Leadership</b>	<b>Leadership Legacy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that the highest aim of leadership is service to others for the common good and learn ways to implement that philosophy</li> <li>• Explore and learn to implement the principles of ethical leadership</li> <li>• Recognize and articulate the importance of utilizing leadership influence beyond campus and the local community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership legacy = sustainability of leadership</li> <li>• Understand and appreciate that cultivating leadership sustainability is crucial to effective leadership</li> <li>• Learn to equip and empower others in order to foster leadership sustainability</li> <li>• Learn to use critical reflection to enhance learning, service, and leadership</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B

### Leadership Program Requirements

#### Courses

- Self-Leadership
- Collaborative Leadership
- Leading Positive Change
- Professional Development Seminar (not required until 2013)

#### Events & Activities

- Programmatic Meetings (4 per academic year)
- Attend on-campus undergraduate leadership conference (once)
- Serve as Leadership Peer Educator\* (twice)
- Participate in an Alternative Break Trip (once)
- Attend the program Retreat (once)
- Attend the program celebration event (annually)

#### Service Hours

- Complete (and document) at least a total of 75 service hours – focus can be campus or community
- Complete (and document) at least a total of 50 service hours – focus must be in community

#### Leadership Capstone Project

- Develop and execute capstone legacy project
- Create capstone project portfolio and reflection

\*Leadership roles that involve educating peers in some manner.

## APPENDIX C

**Self-Leadership Course Syllabus****Required Course Materials**

Kouzes, J.M and Posner, B.Z (2014). *The Student Leadership Challenge, 2nd edition*, San Francisco, CA: Wiley.

**Course Description**

Character is shaped by personal core values. Effective leaders understand their values and live and lead from those values. In this course, you will explore and develop your core values as you begin your leadership journey. Then, you will learn to rely on your core values to guide your decision-making as you develop your personal leadership style and your skills as a leader.

**Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion will be able to:

1. Explain their personal definition of leadership
2. Identify their core values
3. Explain how values influence the leadership process
4. Describe different styles of leadership
5. Articulate the key aspects of their personal leadership style
6. Describe the role of ethics in self-leadership

**Attendance**

Because this class meets only once per week, attendance is crucial to your success. You will be permitted one absence. Missing more classes will result in an Unsatisfactory (U) grade.

**Timeliness and Classroom Etiquette**

All assignments must be turned in at or before the specified time. More details for each assignment will be provided far enough in advance to allow you to prepare for the assignment. Turn off and put away all cell phones before class begins. You may not use your cell phone in any way during class. If you choose to use a laptop computer during class to take notes, you may not access the internet to surf the web, check email, etc. unless instructed to do so. The instructors reserve the right to confiscate any laptop or other electronic device used in an inappropriate manner during class.

**Academic Dishonesty**

The policies concerning academic dishonesty are thoroughly outlined in the Student Code of Conduct publication, which is available on the Dean of Students website. These policies will be strictly adhered to in this course. The instructors adamantly disapprove of academic dishonesty and will prosecute all cases to the fullest extent allowable—a grade of "F" for the course, no exceptions!

**Assignments and Homework**

A complete schedule of the assignments will be provided in a separate document along with details of each assignment and its due date.

### **Grading**

This is a non-credit course and as such is not graded on an A-F scale. The course is graded as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. Students who meet the attendance requirements and satisfactorily complete all assignments will receive a grade of Satisfactory that will appear on a transcript.

### **Course Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Aug. 18	Introductions and Definition of Leadership
Aug. 25	Personal-Best Leadership Experience Stories
Sept. 1	Personal Definition of Leadership
Sept. 8	Model the Way: Clarify Values - Personal Values
Sept. 15	Model The Way: Clarify Values - Personal Values vs. Shared Values
Sept. 22	Introduction to Leadership Styles
Sept. 29	Model the Way: Set The Example - Values & the Leadership Process
Oct. 6	Personality & Leadership: What Color is Your Leadership?
Oct. 13	Personal Leadership Style - Impact of Values & Personality on Style
Oct. 20	Introduction to Ethics
Oct. 27	Ethics & Leadership
Nov. 3	In-class presentation and discussion of Leadership Development Plans
Nov. 10	In-class presentation and discussion of Leadership Development Plans (cont.)
Nov. 17	Translating Your Leadership
Nov. 24	THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!
Dec. 1	Encourage the Heart: How do we celebrate values?

## APPENDIX D

### Collaborative Leadership Course Syllabus

#### **Required Course Materials**

\*Kouzes, J.M and Posner, B.Z (2014). *The Student Leadership Challenge, 2nd edition*, San Francisco, CA: Wiley.

\*StrengthsQuest access code: <https://www.strengthsquest.com/schoolaccess/default.aspx>

#### **Course Description**

From a foundation of group dynamics and strengths, students will discover and explore their talents, teams & team roles, active followership, conflict resolution, and communication. The focal concept for the course will be team building and team leadership.

#### **Learning Objectives**

Upon completion students will be able to:

1. Describe the stages of group development and identify them in a team setting.
2. Understand their personal themes of talent and those of others and identify the leadership domains to which those themes belong.
3. Apply their understanding of themes of talent and leadership domains to develop effective teams.
4. Recognize that to be effective, teams should utilize the diverse strengths of their team members.
5. Discuss how they would apply team members' strengths to create and inspire a shared vision.

#### **Attendance**

Because this class meets only once per week, attendance is crucial to your success. You will be permitted one (1) absence. Missing more classes will result in an Unsatisfactory (U) grade.

#### **Timeliness and Classroom Etiquette**

All assignments must be turned in at or before the specified time. More details for each assignment will be provided far enough in advance to allow you to prepare for the assignment.

Turn off and put away all cell phones before class begins. You may not use your cell phone in any way during class. If you choose to use a laptop computer during class to take notes, you may not access the internet to surf the web, check email, etc. unless instructed to do so. The

instructors reserve the right to confiscate any laptop or other electronic device used in an inappropriate manner during class.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

The policies of concerning academic dishonesty are thoroughly outlined in the Student Code of Conduct publication, which is available on the Dean of Students website. These policies will be strictly adhered to in this course. The instructors adamantly disapprove of academic dishonesty and will prosecute all cases to the fullest extent allowable—a grade of "U" for the course, no exceptions!

### **Assignments and Homework**

A complete schedule of assignments will be provided on the Folio course site along with details of each assignment and its due date.

### **Grading**

This is a non-credit course and as such is not graded on an A-F scale, but is graded as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U). Students who meet the attendance requirements and satisfactorily complete all assignments will receive a grade of Satisfactory that will appear on a transcript.

### **Course Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Aug. 20	Introductions and Philosophy of Student Leadership Challenge
Aug. 27	Teams & Teamwork
Sept. 3	Introduction to Group/Team Development
Sept. 10	Introduction to Strengths - Discovering & Understanding Your Strengths
Sept. 17	Introduction to Strengths - Themes & Teams
Sept. 24	Introduction to Strengths - Developing Your Strengths

Oct. 1	Leadership Practice: Enable Others to Act - Foster Collaboration
Oct. 8	Leadership Practice: Enable Others to Act - Strengthen Others
Oct. 15	Group Dynamics, Strengths, and Practicing Leadership
Oct. 22	The Shadow Side of Strengths
Oct. 29	Managing Group Conflict Through Effective Communication
Nov. 5	Leadership Practice: Inspire a Shared Vision - Envision the Future
Nov. 12	Leadership Practice: Inspire a Shared Vision - Enlist Others
Nov. 19	Strengths: One More Time!
Nov. 26	Thanksgiving Break!
Dec. 3	Serving to Build Presentations

## APPENDIX E

**Leading Positive Change Course Syllabus****Required Course Materials**

Kouzes, J.M and Posner, B.Z (2014). *The Student Leadership Challenge (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

**Course Description**

Each of us has multiple communities of which we are a member- campus, city, a club or organization, etc. Effective leaders understand the context and culture of their communities, and how the role of power can impact these communities. In this course, you will explore and develop an understanding of how to identify and function within an organization's culture. You will also learn how to lead positive change within that culture.

**Learning Objectives**

Upon completion students will be able to:

1. Explain the steps involved in at least one reflective process
2. Examine models & methods for Challenging the Process
3. Identify a source of power they use as leaders
4. Analyze a leadership scenario in terms of:
  - a. Stakeholders
  - b. Intent vs. impact
  - c. Organizational culture
  - d. Sustaining positive change

**Participation**

Your participation in reflections, discussion boards, etc. is essential to your learning and to the overall experience in an online course. Engage deeply with the material and give careful consideration to each assignment. Your goal is to develop and grow as a leader, not simply to “get through” the course.

**Timeliness and Online Etiquette**

All assignments must be turned in on or before the specified time. Handing in assignments late may affect your progress in the course and could result in a grade of **Unsatisfactory**, which would require you to re-take the course.

Be especially aware of the fact that communication in an online course is written and, therefore, lacks the nuances of voice inflections or facial expressions. Read each post or submission carefully before making it public. Take care to be courteous and respectful in all communication. Keep in mind that a sentence written as a joke or in jest does not necessarily come across to the reader as you intended and may be offensive.

**Academic Dishonesty**

The policies of concerning academic dishonesty are thoroughly outlined in the Student Conduct Code publication, which is available on the Dean of Students website. These policies will be strictly adhered to in this course. The instructors adamantly disapprove of academic dishonesty and will prosecute all cases to the fullest extent allowable—a grade of **Unsatisfactory** for the course, no exceptions!

### **ADA Statement**

Any candidate who has a disability that substantially limits learning in a higher education setting may contact the Student Disability Resource Center for information regarding their eligibility for reasonable accommodations. The Center is located in Cone Hall and the office telephone number is 478-0666.

### **Assignments and Homework**

Each module is self-contained and, as such, has assignments, homework, and due dates embedded within the module. Pay careful attention to the due dates and keep track of your progress. Due dates can be found at the end of the syllabus.

### *Discussion Boards*

On weeks with discussion boards, you are expected to post at least one original thought prior to midnight on Wednesday. You must post comments on your classmates' original thoughts by no later than 5 pm on Friday. A long post does not necessarily equate to a quality post. Please take care to post relevant, thoughtful, and appropriate thoughts that move our group conversation forward. Do not be afraid to challenge each other, but be sure to be respectful in your challenge.

### *Reflections*

When a reflection is the assignment for the week, the prompt will be found in that week's module. There will be a Dropbox to upload your final document. Each reflection should be between 1-3 pages, double spaced, 1" margins, and no larger than size 12 font.

### **Grading**

This is a non-credit course and as such is not formally graded. The course is "graded" as **Satisfactory** or **Unsatisfactory** and these grades are awarded based on completion of all assignments and demonstration of full participation in the course. Participants in the Southern Leaders program **must** earn a grade of **Satisfactory** in order to meet the requirements of the program.

This course will appear on your transcript as a non-credit course. While a "U" grade will not impact your GPA, it will be mentioned on your transcript.

<b>Module</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Topic/Activity</b>
1	8/28	Welcome, Reflection

2	9/4	Organizational & Community Culture
3	9/11	Intent vs. Impact
4	9/25	Power
5	10/2	Challenge the process
6	10/16	Asset Based Community Development & Stakeholders
7	10/30	Organizational Culture
8	TBD (in person)	Leadership Scenario Project
9	TBD	Course Wrap Up/Reflection
<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>		

## APPENDIX F

**Interview Protocol****Heading**

**Interview Protocol:** Exploring Graduate Valuation of an Undergraduate Leadership Program

**Date:**

**Time of Interview:**

**Location:**

**Interviewee:**

**Professional Position of Interviewee:**

**Questions**

Note\*\* R1, R2, R3, R4 signifies the questions direct tie to one of the four research questions in this study

1. Using the program requirements sheet I provided, tell me about your experiences in the Southern Leaders program from the time you began the program to the time you completed the program (R1, R3).
  - a. Possible Probe: Walk me through that experience
  - b. Possible Probe: What about that experience is meaningful for you?
  - c. Possible Probe: How did you participate in that experience?
  - d. Possible Probe: I noticed that you failed to mention \_\_\_\_\_ from the program requirements. What could you tell me about that experience?
  
2. What would you say you learned from those experiences (R2)?
  - a. Possible Probe: Tell me about the environment in which you learned about\_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Possible Probe: How would you say you learned about \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Possible Probe: Would you elaborate on \_\_\_\_\_?

3. How have you applied this learning at work (R2)?
  - a. Possible Probe: What did it look like to apply that concept?
  - b. Possible Probe: How did you apply any of this learning at a previous work environment?
  - c. Possible Probe: Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_.
  
4. What components of the Southern Leaders program provide the most value for you today in the workplace (R1)?
  - a. Possible Probe: Could you further describe the value of \_\_\_\_\_ for you at work?
  - b. Possible Probe: What about \_\_\_\_\_ in the program was meaningful to you?
  - c. Possible Prove: Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_.
  
5. What would you say is missing from the Southern Leaders program that would benefit your effectiveness at work today (R3)?
  - a. Possible Probe: How would \_\_\_\_\_ benefit you today?
  - b. Possible Probe: How do you think we could implement that idea?
  - c. Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_.

6. Tell me about some specific examples of when you applied something you learned from the Southern Leaders program to your work (R2).
  - a. Possible Probe: What led to you taking that action?
  - b. Possible Probe: How did people react to that?
  - c. Possible Probe: Walk me through more of the details from that experience.
  - d. Possible Probe: Would you elaborate on \_\_\_\_\_?
  
7. Describe your personal best leadership moment at work (R4).
  - a. Possible Probe: What is meaningful to you about this leadership moment?
  - b. Possible Probe: Tell me more about the specific actions you took.
  - c. Possible Probe: How did others react?
  - d. Possible Probe: Would you elaborate on \_\_\_\_\_?

## **Thank You**

That concludes our interview. Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful responses.