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INVESTING IN CRITICAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITH UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:

A qualitative examination of a semester-long internship

Abstract

The study explored the experiences of undergraduate students during a semester-long, leadership development internship course offered at a large research university in the southern United States. The researchers employed qualitative content analysis to examine sixty-five student internship portfolios and identify the leadership capabilities that students applied and/or developed as part of the internship. Students identified self-awareness, growth, project planning, team management, and adversity management as the main leadership capabilities used during their internship experience. Results also indicated that students expanded their concept of leadership and built leadership self-efficacy. The study provides preliminary support for including a leadership internship within the curriculum to support student leadership development.

Introduction

Leadership development "has grown into a strategy that is utilized globally by organizations of all types" (Hannum, Martineau & Reinelt, 2007, p. xiii), and the demand for leadership development programs will likely continue to grow (Riggio, 2008). In higher education settings, leadership education and leadership development programs have been increasingly popular. Universities offer a variety of learning opportunities, from extracurricular activities to academic courses, and in some cases four-year academic leadership studies programs (Brungardt, 1997; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; Polk, 2014; Schwartz, Axtman, & Freeman, 1998).

Beyond formal training in leadership, such as structured classroom-based courses, studies have recognized the importance of developmental

experiences that incorporate elements of challenge and practical experience in enhancing one's leadership potential (Brungardt, 1997; Van Velsor, McCauley & Ruderman, 2010). Leadership development is a continuous learning process that can be fostered through developmental experiences, which can span from formal to informal learning activities, and promote one's leadership capacity (Avolio, 2005; Brungardt, 1997; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Van Velsor et al., 2010). Leadership development programs are moving away from the classroom to include practices like mentoring and action learning and primarily focus "…on building and using interpersonal competencies" (Day, 2001, p. 585).

This study examined a semester-long leadership internship that provided developmental leadership experiences to undergraduate students. Specifically, the study addressed the following research question:

What leadership capabilities have the students applied and/or developed during their community-based leadership development internship? Building on Robinson's (2010) definition of capabilities, we define leadership capabilities as the leadership knowledge and skills that students applied and/or developed to lead a group of people to accomplish well-defined goals associated with a specific project or initiative. The purpose of this examination is to determine the pedagogical value of having students participate in a semester-long internship and foster evidence-based practice in leadership education.

Designing Programs for Student Leadership Development

Eich (2008) examined a range of high-quality undergraduate leadership programs offered in the United States and concluded that high-quality leadership programs focus on "lived leadership" by providing students space to "do leadership" and by encouraging them to construct meaning from their experiences both individually and collectively. Experiential learning, therefore, "provides a solid foundation for leadership education" (Guthrie & Jones, 2012, p. 54) and informs the development of effective student leadership programs. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, illustrates the role of experience in learning, particularly if it allows learners to construct meaning out of their experiences, through observation and reflection. Kolb (1984) reasoned that learning from experience consists of four steps: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

The intentional use of student development theories, particularly student leadership development theories and frameworks, allows leadership educators to build more informed and impactful leadership programs (Owen, 2012) and identify effective instructional and assessment strategies to build the leadership capacity

of students (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) developed the Leadership Identity Development (LID) theory and model. LID identifies six developmental stages that students experience as they develop their leadership identity and discusses, among other things, the importance of developmental influences like meaningful involvement and reflective learning in enabling students to grow as leaders.

More recently, and based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) have developed a more targeted learning model geared towards the development of student leadership programs, the Leader and Follower Experiences as a Source of Transformation Learning model (p. 151). This model is "a representation of the union between leadership education and experiential learning" (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 149) and it consists of four stages: experience as a leader or follower, critical reflection, experiential abstraction (i.e., meaning-making process), and metacognitive discovery and exploration.

The Leadership Learning Framework (LLF) by Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) points to the multifaceted nature of leadership learning and focuses on six aspects: leadership knowledge, leadership development, leadership training, leadership observation, leadership engagement, and metacognition. The authors use the metaphor of a steering wheel where leadership knowledge encompasses the whole wheel; development, training, observation, and engagement represent the four rims of the wheel and feed metacognition that is at the center of the wheel (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 57). Each learning aspect includes a set of suggested instructional and assessment strategies (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018).

Leadership educators have advocated for the inclusion of experiential and reflection components as effective pedagogical tools because they allow students to make deeper connections between

leadership theory and practice (Burbank, Odom, & Sandlin, 2015; Densten & Gray, 2001; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Guthrie & Bertrand Jones, 2012; Volpe White & Guthrie, 2016). For instance, Burbank et al. (2015) indicated that high-impact practices like service-learning projects (Kuh, 2008), allowed students to develop their leadership skills by providing the space for students to practice leadership and reflect on their experiences. Furthermore, Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) suggest the use of highly interactive and interpersonal instructional activities, like internships and reflective practice, to promote the development of students as leaders. As Jenkins (2012) has noted, "Leadership education can and should do more than enhance and foster leadership abilities in a vacuum" (p. 21).

As "leadership educators attempt to expand the capacities of individual students" (Burbank et al., 2015, p. 183) through curricular and co-curricular activities, it is important to continue our efforts to understand further how different leadership development programs and courses impact student leadership development (Posner, 2012). The current study contributes to these efforts by exploring how a leadership development internship course impacts student leadership development.

Study Context

The study was based on a three-credit-hour leadership development internship course which aimed to give undergraduate students an authentic leadership experience. This course served as the capstone for an 18-credit hour Leadership Development Minor (LDM) at a large research university in the southern United States. The LDM consists of three core leadership courses offered exclusively online, two electives, and the internship that is at the completion of the coursework. The core leadership courses included introduction to leadership development, leadership concepts and principles, and leadership skills development. The internship course had no in-class meetings. The minor is accessible to every student of the university community; thus, it is not major-specific and provides the opportunity to all students to develop a broad and interdisciplinary perspective on leadership.

The course utilized a community-based learning approach requiring students to work in an actual organization for at least 135 hours in a semester and lead a group of people towards the completion of specified goals and initiatives. Students secured their internships and signed contracts of agreement with internship site supervisors stipulating their intention to intern during the semester. These contracts and an internship proposal were submitted to the instructional team for approval and feedback. The proposal required a detailed description of (a) the setting or organization in which the internship took would take place; (b) the initiates in which the student would assume a leadership role; (c) achievable initiative outcomes; (d) a plan for monitoring goal progress; (e) a preliminary plan for leading followers; and (f) personal leadership goals. Students with approved proposals were permitted to move forward in the course.

The main deliverable for the course was an internship portfolio (IP). The submitted IPs represented a purposeful collection of materials aimed to demonstrate the use and development of student leadership competencies during the internship. Each IP contained materials in the form of outputs, products, or accomplishments and was organized around goals, initiatives, and outcomes associated with one or more projects or initiatives in which the student was engaged.

Specifically, each IP included: (a) the nature of the internship and the leadership setting; (b) the specific internship initiatives/goals and achievable outcomes in addition to the students' personal leadership development goals/objectives; (c) the critical leadership challenges students encountered pursuing the internship goals and achievable outcomes and the efforts (e.g., use of leadership strengths) associated with overcoming these challenges; (d) the leadership capabilities students cultivated as part of the internship experience in order to achieve

their personal leadership development goals/ objectives; (e) a purposeful collection of evidence (e.g., work products and outputs like project reports, videotaped meetings etc.) in the form of "portfolio entries" that demonstrated what was accomplished and learned during the internship; (f) a narrative for each portfolio entry examining and reflecting on the leadership efforts associated with the attainment of personal leadership development goals or achievable outcomes; and (g) a summary narrative assessing the overall internship experience.

Methodology

Qualitative research has been deemed appropriate for exploratory studies that seek to understand the views of a participant sample (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010; Creswell, 2007). In this study, we utilized qualitative or ethnographic content analysis to understand the first-hand accounts of student leadership experiences in a semester-long internship. Although the participants in this study underwent extensive preparation for a leadership role through the Leadership Development Minor curricula, it was the leadership internship that provided an arena for applying their skills and knowledge. Thus, the portfolios that documented leadership experiences during the internship constituted the unit of analysis in this study. Electronic portfolios have increasingly been utilized in higher education. They serve as a practical tool for teaching and learning because students assume responsibility for their learning (Cambridge, 2001; Lankes, 1995; Zubizarreta, 2004). Portfolios also provide an authentic demonstration of student accomplishments (Lankes, 1995, p. 4) "through and in their own words" (Ruona, 2005, p. 234).

Sampling and Participants. We reviewed sixty-five electronic portfolios in this study. The portfolios were submitted by students with a declared LDM who had completed all prerequisite foundational courses before enrolling in the internship capstone course. The characteristics of the sample participants were as follows: 33 males and 32 females; 43

Caucasians, 15 African Americans, 2 Hispanic and Caucasian, 1 American Indian or Alaskan Native, 3 undisclosed races, and 1 person with two or more races. Academic majors ranged from political science and communication studies to sports administration and math. In total, 15 majors were represented in our sample. Finally, internship experiences varied in nature with students interning for private and nonprofit organizations and performing a variety of tasks that emphasized components of leadership.

Data Analysis. Because this was an exploratory study, we reviewed the portfolios with the intention of allowing themes to reveal themselves through thematic analysis (Klenke, 2008). A theme is "a pattern found in the information that at a minimum describes and organizes the possible observations or at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 161). The revelation of themes followed Ruona's (2005) four stages: (a) data preparation; (b) familiarization; (c) coding; and (d) generating meaning.

Data preparation. To preserve the anonymity of participants in the study, the names of the portfolio authors were removed and replaced with a letter identifier - "A" through "BM." The researchers then did a cursory review of the portfolios to become familiar with the format and content. Together the researchers agreed on which parts of the portfolio would be appropriate to answer the research question: What leadership capabilities have the students applied and/or developed during their community-based leadership development internship? These were portfolio sections (c), (d), (f), and (g) explained above in the Study Context.

> Familiarization. During familiarization, the researchers closely reviewed the data in two stages. The first examination of the data involved becoming familiar with the content, while the second review of data identified phrases and sentences that addressed the research question. Researchers made notes in the margin that represented initial themes or condensed meaning units (Bengtsson, 2016). Meaning

Table 1

Description of Leadership Themes from Students' Internship Portfolios

Leadership Capabilities	
Theme	Description
(a) Self-Awareness	Self-awareness is the process through which students became aware of their strengths and weaknesses as leaders. Prior to beginning their internships, students indicated their perceived leadership strengths and weakness. After completing their internships, students reassessed their leadership strengths and weaknesses.
(b) Growth	Leader growth refers to the change that students underwent as they became more competent leaders. Students used their self-awareness to assess changes in their leadership capabilities and identify areas for future improvement.
(c) Project Planning	Students developed project goals, recognized opportunities and potential challenges, and identified stakeholders and resources.
(d) Team Management	Students used leadership techniques, strategies, and processes to direct team members towards achieving program or project goals and objectives.
(e) Adversity Management	Students used leadership strategies to deal with challenges attributed to stakeholder resistance and other sources (i.e., not related to team management issues).
Beyond Leadership Capabilities	
Theme	Description
(f) Expanding View of Leadership	Students reassessed their definitions of leadership and moved towards a broader view of leadership.
(g) Building Leadership Self-Efficacy	Students' belief in their ability as leaders; students perceived themselves as being more competent leaders and believed that they could effectively master future leadership challenges.

Themes

Leadership capabilities. The capabilities students exhibited in their leadership initiatives are captured in five themes: (a) developing self-awareness; (b) growth; (c) project planning; (d) team management; and (e) adversity management.

(a) Self-awareness. Upon entering the internship, students were already aware of their strengths and weakness, mainly due to their participation in the introductory leadership course within the LDM. They viewed the internship experience as an opportunity

to examine those strengths and weaknesses further. Students commented on different aspects of their strengths and weaknesses, such as relationship management, emotional and cultural intelligence, communication skills, and personal attributes including impatience and indecisiveness. Student E reflected,

> in the Self-Assessment I did in [LDM introductory core course 1], Relationship Management and Social Awareness are where I was most deficient. I feel that working on this type of leadership role will

be beneficial and help me to develop my leadership in those areas.

Increased self-awareness was a central theme of the internship experience (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives et al., 2005). The words of Student AN unequivocally capture this notion:

> I have become more self-aware of my actions and more aware of how I affect others. Through this, I feel that I am able to maintain more relationships, have a better understanding of others, and make it a point to correct my actions if they are incorrect. I would say that my self-awareness has been a pivotal learning experience for me throughout my internship.

(b) Growth. Growth refers to the change students underwent in becoming more competent leaders. Students used their self-awareness to assess changes in their leadership capabilities and identify areas for future improvement. Almost all participants exhibited signs of growth in their portfolios, and areas of future leadership development included team management, cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence and communication skills. Student R noted, "…in the future I will need to trust and delegate more tasks to my followers and allow them to have some authority on making decisions…" In addition, Student AM wrote,

> one area that I need to develop further is my cultural intelligence…I did not have very many interactions with students of other cultures during this semester… in the future, I would like to seek out a more culturally diverse work environment so that I may better those skills…I need to discover and seek out more new experiences.

A number of students identified things they could do or activities in which they could participate that would facilitate their leadership growth. For example, Student L commented, "…I need to work on improving my public speaking skills since it is

essential for effective leadership. Therefore, I plan to join Toastmasters this summer so I can improve this area of my leadership."

When reflecting on their ability to meet personal leadership goals the majority of the students reported that they were successful in achieving them. For example, Student AB commented, "one of my goals was to be an effective respected leader…I think the best thing I did to achieve this was adjust as needed." Likewise, Student AI observed, "I did make improvements on self-organization and creating accurate time constraints for myself…" Student AK assessed that she exceeded her initial leadership goals and remarked, "not only did I achieve my leadership goals, objectives, and developmental outcomes outlined in my proposal, but I surpassed my own expectations."

Finally, most students noted that they were able to utilize their leadership strengths in directing their team effectively and overcoming challenges. Student AJ commented the following:

> I feel that I did a great job in managing the group I had this semester…I created a plan, met with my co-workers and effectively relayed the plan to them and efficiently managed the situation to where they knew exactly what their jobs would be, and everything went according to plan.

Alternatively, some students felt that they could have led their team more efficiently. For example, Student AM shared that "another thing I would have done differently is setting up better timelines for things…I believe that if we had put more realistic dates and timelines on things, we could have been much more efficient."

(c) Project planning. The application of leadership capabilities became evident during the initial stages of the internship where students had to develop preliminary goals, identify opportunities and potential challenges, identify stakeholders and gain their support, as well as identify and utilize resources. Student AN described her plan to shape the attitudes

of her followers:

> My main goal is for the group leaders to create a comfortable environment for the high school students…In addition, the group leaders must be able to maintain a motivational energy within their group. To do this, the group leaders will: create cheers, be open to the group about their leadership experiences, and have the students participate in several activities when volunteers are needed.

Students also identified challenges that could potentially hinder the success of their initiatives. As Student P mentioned, "I anticipate some challenges due to the remote nature of the internship, not being geographically physically present with the small group I am leading." They also were able to identify opportunities. As Student AE described,

> I plan…to create a flyer that can be placed on all unit announcement boards throughout the hospital. Once all the collection jars have been placed in the units I will have the flyer created placed in our organization's weekly newsletter that is sent via email to all employees and on our organization intranet…

Furthermore, students recognized the importance of identifying key stakeholders and gaining their support to achieve their internship goals. Student F exemplified the importance of stakeholders in the following:

> I have had to keep a tight relationship with the board of directors when they were making difficult decisions to replace me. I have had to keep trusting relationships with parents of my employees so they are comfortable with them working for us.

Finally, students were able to identify and utilize resources in the internship setting to accomplish their project goals: Student AM recalled,

> I plan to use as many workers' testimonials as I can in order to facilitate the best

changes for this employer. In addition to these people, I have my teammates of the Training and Development staff. These staff members will grant me access to the HR section…showing me hiring dates, interview strategies…etc. It is with these resources that I will be able to make my important changes.

(d) Team management. Team management refers to the various leadership techniques, strategies, and processes that student leaders used to direct their team members towards achieving program goals and objectives. Overall, in working with their team members, student leaders exhibited group-oriented skills aimed at fostering collaboration, creating a common purpose, and dealing with controversy (Dugan & Komives, 2007).

Students recognized the value and importance of teamwork and Student R's comment, encapsulates this notion of collaborative leadership: "…I learned that by collaborating with others and listening to their ideas, that their strengths made up for my weaknesses and together we created something much better than any of us could have created alone." Furthermore, students inspired a shared vision to their team. Student R described, "I listened to their [the volunteers] suggestions and created a course of action that incorporated their ideas so that we could work towards our common vision successfully."

Students realized the importance of effective and open communication to team success. Student K commented on this connection by sharing, "it was astounding how disconnected a group could become if only one person did not communicate well…Effective communication is the soul of any good team." Therefore, they recognized that they would be more successful in achieving their goals if they openly communicated with their team members and considered their ideas. This realization was expressed by Student Q:

> …I learned that…to achieve my leadership goals…openness is the best policy. Without

being open to other's ideas, a great idea can fall through the cracks. In addition, listening to just the idea is not sufficient. Digging deeper into its justification can open a broader scope of possibilities.

Many student leaders incorporated different team-building strategies, such as social activities and daily meetings, in an attempt to increase the effectiveness of their team. Student AN expressed this need to build a cohesive team:

Requiring that the team spend a certain amount of hours per week together was a great idea because they were able to talk about interests, become familiar with how to interact with each other, and most importantly: learn how to function without me as their "leader" at all points in time.

Another important set of teamwork strategies employed by student leaders included involving team members in the decision-making process, collaborating on tasks, and seeking feedback. Some students, such as Students AQ and AE. were more successful than others. Student AQ highlighted that "I have productively used all feedback, including successfully fixing and installing a new stereo system…" Student AE provided additional evidence in her comments:

> For this meeting my goal was to present the project idea to them and get their feedback on ways to make it a success. After presenting the content to my team everyone was very enthusiastic and ready to begin working and coming up with ideas on how to make this project a success.

Furthermore, Student AG described, "the overall goal I wanted to reach was making the book fair a success. As a group we decided to judge this success by setting a goal that dealt with the total money earned." Some student leaders also encouraged collaboration on tasks, "... group collaboration led not only to the minimum requirements being met, but also to creative ideas and work that exceeded even my expectations" (Student AQ).

Other students were less successful or experienced difficulties in making members feel valued and included in the team. This forced students to reflect on their strategies for addressing their team's dynamics. Student AN described "I had…a member approach me about not feeling useful and needed in the process…so this had me severely rethink the way I was organizing this great event and the amount of help that I had turned down." Some students felt that they were more effective than others in delegating authority. Student AE noted, "I found myself being able to delegate the different tasks to my team in order to keep things running smoothly. I planned out a rotation schedule that gave each team member an assignment for their day…" Conversely, Student V found delegating tasks a challenge and commented,

> the challenge I ran into was balancing the workload with my team. The nature of who I am wants to be like Superman and take on a lot and try to do almost everything. I soon ran into the problem of feeling overwhelmed and then my assistant directors not feeling involved. I soon realized I had to share the wealth. This alleviated me in some areas but I also found my team was more motivated once they felt a part of achieving our goals.

As Student V pointed out, by delegating tasks team members felt more motivated to work towards achieving the program's goals. In general, students utilized a variety of techniques to motivate their team members, from praise and recognition to organizing celebratory events. For example, Student AQ employed recognition as a motivational technique:

> I knew that it was important for me to place an emphasis on recognition when deserved. The couple of times I made a point to stop what I was doing, and tell the guys how great they are doing and how impressed I was by them, really had such a positive impact on everyone. Not just them, but on me as well. I really began to

feel like I was an effective leader at that point.

Likewise, Student AA acknowledged the efforts of the team members by giving awards for their hard work: "I decided to honor each individual team member with an award for their contribution to the team and a small speech about their involvement and character. I recognized members for [their] hard work, leadership, honesty, and positivity."

Finally, many student leaders recognized that for their team to reach the program goals and objectives, they would have to ensure that all team members were held accountable for their actions and that all of them – including the team leader – had to put the team's interest first. Student D states that "making sure that everyone's attitude was beneficial to the overall achievement of team success also became one of my responsibilities as a leader, making sure that no one person felt that they were bigger than the team."

(e) Adversity management. As part of the internship experience, student leaders reported facing several challenges that they had to conquer and find ways to solve (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). These challenges were attributed primarily to resistance from stakeholders and other sources, including lack of resources, technical difficulties, and unexpected circumstances. In dealing with resistance from stakeholders, most students described following a twofold process: (a) first, they identified the source(s) of resistance, which primarily included team members and supervisors; (b) then, they attempted to overcome resistance by predominantly relying on their leadership strengths. Student D reflected, "there were times that I felt as though my teammates were not taking me seriously and wondered if I should just stop, but I knew I had to stay positive and things would work themselves out." Likewise, Student AB described, "members of my group did not want to attend some events that we needed to promote at…I had to persuade them that everyone has a job to do…" On the other hand, Student F had to deal with a challenging

work relationship with a superior: "Relationship management has…been very important as the new manager and I have a bit of a rocky past that we were both able to overcome and are now working extremely well together."

In dealing with challenges concerning lack of resources, technical difficulties and unexpected circumstances, most student leaders indicated that they relied on their leadership strengths and their team members' abilities. Student G commented, "another, strength is my resilience. When tasks did not go as successful as I anticipated I was able to push through and lead my team through in a positive manner." Student AM when faced with the overwhelming amount of work needed to implement program goals wrote,

> I had underestimated the goals I had set. Yet still determined to face them, I realized that I had to back off from everything and concentrate on one item at a time… this taught me a new appreciation for time management as well as resource management.

When overcoming budgetary constraints, Student AI instilled confidence in her members: "I showed my team…I had faith in them that they are creative enough to aid me in creating a successful program even without an adequate budget." Student AP was able to implement resourceful solutions to address the team's constraints:

> In an effort to advertise this event across campus, yet stick to a very low budget, the members of the Organization…helped by promoting the event to their friends and classmates…To complement our word-of-mouth advertising campaign, I fully designed and created a flyer using Adobe InDesign to be posted around campus and distributed via email and Social Media networks.

Overall, in dealing with challenges student leaders were persistent, creative, resourceful, and took initiative to overcome difficulties and reach their

goals and objectives.

Beyond leadership capabilities. Besides the five leadership capabilities identified in the portfolios, two additional themes emerged - expanding view of leadership and building leadership self-efficacy. These themes demonstrate the ancillary impact of the internship experience.

(f) Expanding view of leadership. By the conclusion of the internship, many students had reassessed their personal definition of leadership and moved towards a broader view of leadership (Komives et al., 2005). For example, Student AJ wrote, "…being a leader is a process…you have to strive for it; however, you have to want to become a better leader and work towards that every day." Student AN, further noted, "Leadership… is about the learning and growing process you go through" and went on to define leadership as a way of empowering others by commenting that, "Leadership is developing others and yourself. Leadership is one of the most selfless positions that you can put yourself into." Likewise, Student AJ viewed empowering others as one of the most important aspects of leadership and noted,

> The accomplishment of helping my teammates grow as leaders maybe the most special to me because not only did I have an effect on my life as a leaders, but I also had an effect on the life of someone else as a leader…That means a lot to me and I hope to experience this type of satisfaction from being a leader in the future.

Along with students AN and AJ, many other students expanded their view of leadership to encompass the notion of empowering others as well as creating positive change. For example,

Student B revealed, "…I have learned that leadership does not mean I am the leader. It means I am working with others to make a change." Finally, the words of Student AO capture the essence of most of the students' insights: "Before, I used to

believe that leadership was associated with an older, more authoritative person. Now, I realize that leadership is about the passion for positive change, congruence, drive, collaboration, and commitment that a person exhibits."

(f) Building leadership self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to a person's perception of their ability to reach a goal (Bandura, 1977). Leadership self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to lead effectively. By the end of the internship, most students perceived themselves as being more competent leaders and believed that they could effectively master future leadership challenges. Student AP noted, "I [now] have the perseverance and drive it takes to be in a position of leadership." Student AJ further highlighted this perception by revealing, "I am proud to say that I did grow as a leader…there is no official day I said 'hey I grew as a leader'…but I definitely realized I am a stronger leader than I was before the internship." In addition, Student L noted, "…I know this leadership experience gave me the confidence to pursue endeavors and assume roles I would have otherwise been timid to try to achieve." Student AQ unequivocally captures this notion by writing, "putting myself in the role of a leader and having to deal with real life situations and people, I gained more confidence in those few months than I did in all of college."

Discussion

Overall, the experiences and reflections of students, as described in their IPs, pointed to the instructional value of the internship experience in developing leadership capacity. Even though the experiences of students varied, the examination of the IPs indicated the internship experience, to some extent, expanded their leadership capacity through the application and development of leadership capabilities. The emergent themes demonstrated that within the internship experience framework, students: became more self-aware and grew as leaders; and, applied and further developed their

project planning, team and adversity management leadership capabilities. They also shared that they broadened their view of leadership and perceived themselves as more competent leaders who are capable of effectively dealing with future leadership challenges.

Leadership Capabilities. Seemiller (2013) analyzed a total of 522 academic programs to develop a comprehensive dataset of student leadership competencies comprising of sixty competency areas within eight categories (e.g., interpersonal interaction, group dynamics). These competencies have been identified as important learning outcomes when designing leadership development programs and courses and are examined across four dimensions: knowledge, value, ability (motivation or skill), and behavior (Seemiller, 2013). Our study focused on the competency dimensions of knowledge and skill (i.e., ability) and identified five leadership capabilities that when compared against Seemiller's (2013) list encompass multiple competency areas.

Within the area of self-awareness and growth, students extensively reflected on their leadership strengths and weaknesses and during the internship made adjustments that capitalized on their strengths and mitigated their weaknesses. For instance, students reported relying on their leadership strengths when coping with challenges (i.e., adversity management) and managing their team. (i.e., team management). They also identified areas of future improvement. This type of "perspective for self" and self-development is vital for effective leaders (Andenoro et al., 2013; Seemiller, 2013). Moreover, planning and leading an initiative required students to engage in project planning to create goals and plan for goal attainment; competencies that fall under the strategic planning category (Seemiller, 2013). Adversity management required students to deal with challenges attributed to resistance from stakeholders and other sources (e.g., lack of resources). To deal with these challenges, students employed competencies in the communication (e.g.,

conflict negotiation, advocating for a point of view) and personal behavior (e.g., resiliency, responding to ambiguity, functioning independently, initiative) categories.

Team management required students to employ numerous strategies to direct and support team members to achieve desired goals and objectives. These included inspiring a shared vision, teamwork, open communication, group decision making, collaboration on tasks, team-building strategies, seeking feedback from team members, motivating team members, rewarding team members, putting the team first, trusting team members, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of team members, and delegating authority. The inherent complexity of leading a group is reflected in the range of competencies students reported using, particularly across the interpersonal interaction, group dynamics, communication, and personal behavior categories (Seemiller, 2013).

Although the internship in this study was not designed to develop a predetermined set of competencies, the findings revealed that students applied, with some consistency, a core set of leadership competencies. Therefore, leadership educators might design programs and course with intentionality (Jenkins & Allen, 2017); this is focusing the internship on developing a specific grouping of leadership competencies. Doing so might allow students to capitalize on their leadership strengths and further enhance the pedagogical value of the internship (Croft & Seemiller, 2017; Seemiller, 2017).

Beyond Leadership Capabilities. By their accounts, students expanded their view of leadership practice. This view embraced the notions of non-positional leadership and highlighted leadership as an ongoing learning process (Komives et al., 2005). According to the Leadership Identity Model (LID), a broadened perspective of leadership modifies a student's leadership identify (Komives et al., 2005; Owen, 2012). Helping students develop their leadership identity requires leadership educators to "create environments, opportunities,

and conditions that encourage more complex ways of being" (Owen, 2012, p. 26) and incorporate developmental influences that allow students to take on leadership roles and engage in reflective learning (Owen, 2012).

The opportunity to hone one's leadership skills by addressing real challenges gave students a great sense of accomplishment when they were successful in completing their tasks. Students were not working on textbook or case scenarios. Instead, the challenges and problems they addressed were real and contributed to building leadership self-efficacy. Building off Bandura's (1977) definition of self-efficacy, leadership self-efficacy can be defined as "a student's beliefs about his or her abilities to exercise their leadership knowledge and skills in a given situation" (Denzine, 1999, p. 3). Dugan and Komives (2007, 2010) in their studies examining the development of leadership capacity in college students identified that beyond various pre-college and college factors, leadership self-efficacy substantially contributed to leadership development according to the social change model. Furthermore, findings from empirical studies using the Student Leadership Practices Inventory suggested that students who viewed themselves as more effective leaders compared to their peers were more frequently involved in leadership initiatives (Posner 2004, 2012).

Transformational Leadership Learning. The leadership internship as a form of experiential learning "create[s] a practice field…for students to put their knowledge into action" (Jenkins & Allen, 2017, p. 54). The experiences shared in the IPs suggest that the internship facilitated transformational leadership learning, which is captured in Guthrie and Jenkins' (2018) model of leader and follower experiences as a source of transformational learning. The model includes four stages: experience as a leader or follower; critical reflection; experiential abstraction; and, metacognitive discovery and exploration (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). The community-based internship provided a rich experience for students to act

in a leadership role. Students engaged in critical reflection by adapting their leadership definition and style to accommodate their followers and situational requirements. They questioned and altered their underlying leadership assumptions as they became self-aware, managed adversity, directed team members, and broadened their leadership concept.

Critical reflection was an important and required component of the IPs. The process pushed students to make sense of their experiences (i.e., experiential abstraction), which echoes the importance of incorporating regular reflection in leadership learning (Volpe White & Guthrie, 2016). Finally, during the internship students were able to test new skills and approaches (metacognitive discovery and exploration) and also consider new ways of doing things if given similar opportunities in the future. It is important to note that students cycled through these stages more than once and that each cycle helped facilitate metacognition. As new issues, opportunities, and challenges arose within the internship context, students would engage in critical reflection and meaning-making and try out new approaches based on their competencies.

The findings point to the multifaceted nature of leadership learning as captured in the Leadership Learning Framework and specifically to the three out of the six aspects outlined in the framework: leadership knowledge, leadership engagement, and metacognition (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 57). Students reported relying on their prior leadership knowledge to navigate through the internship experience (e.g., in terms of self-awareness and team management) highlighting the importance of leadership knowledge as an encompassing aspect of leadership learning. Participating students started the internship only after having passed the Leadership Development Minor (LDM) core courses. LDM core courses focus on helping students increase their level of self-awareness in terms of their strengths and weaknesses in various areas of leadership development and expose them to foundational leadership theories and concepts. In terms of leadership engagement, the internship

provided an experiential learning opportunity where students are active participants. Finally, the structure of the internship course required students to prepare a proposal prior to starting the internship, monitor their progress through regular portfolio entries, and assess their overall internship experience, allowing students to explore metacognitive processes according to the three-phase process outlined by Guthrie and Jenkins (2018, p. 73).

In discussing the design of effective leadership programs, Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) built off of Eich's (2008) work to outline characteristics that promote student leadership learning, some of which include creating an authentic leadership learning environment that challenges yet supports learning, providing opportunities for practice, and incorporating purposeful reflection. When viewing the leadership internship through this lens, students were able to delve into each of these areas by practicing leadership in a real setting. While at their internship sites, students acted rather independently of the instructional team. Notably absent from the IPs was mention of attempts to contact the instructor, peers, mentors, family and friends for support. These valuable sources of support were underutilized because students may have assumed that part of their task is to act independently. This observation could be relevant to leadership educators when designing similar developmental experiences requiring students to work more independently (i.e., not under the direct supervision of the instructional team) and the element of support might be underdeveloped or overlooked. Creating a challenging yet supportive learning environment is integral to effective leadership learning (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). High-impact practices like service learning and internships (Kuh, 2008) can deepen students understanding of taught leadership practices when paired with in-class activities (Burbank et al. 2015). Therefore, embedding in the internship supportive activities like peer discussion boards, student- or instructor-facilitated class discussions, and

scheduled debriefing sessions with the instructional team could provide a richer and more effective leadership learning environment. It may also give students additional opportunities for structured reflection that can deepen their leadership learning (Volpe White & Guthrie, 2016).

Limitations and Future Research

A first limitation of the study concerns the validity threat that may be present because internship portfolios were submitted for a grade. Zubizarreta (2004) discusses the threat student composing portfolios to meet the perceived desires of the professor rather than expressing their true experiences. Another potential validity threat involves one of the researchers who was an instructor for the internship course and helped grade portfolios. Having the instructor participate in the study may have introduced some bias, although it was partially controlled by having more than one rater. A second limitation of the study is inter-rater reliability threat (Weber, 1990). Content analysis generally requires that two or more raters select the quotes and code the quotes independently (Weber, 1990). In this study, the two raters selected quotes independently but performed the initial and final coding in collaboration. Finally, because most of the students graduated after their internship, our analysis was based on the review of documents only; there was no post-internship follow-up or triangulation of data.

Future studies examining the impact of instructional strategies like the internship can better use the learning outcomes of the internship to guide the assessment criteria. In this way, a student may reveal more targeted information about the effectiveness of the internship in developing specific competencies. These outcomes may also be aligned with established student leadership models and frameworks (e.g., see Owen, 2012 for an extensive discussion on LID assessment methods). As an internship can form part of a wider program initiative, such as the LDM in this study, it

is beneficial to link the internship to its foundational knowledge courses. Creating this linkage involves strategically assessing the learning outcomes of these courses in the internship. This may require a more comprehensive study to tease out all the relevant learning outcomes and capture them at various stages of the internship process.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the instructional value of participating in a semester-long leadership internship. The findings of the study provide preliminary support for the potential use of an immersive leadership internship to strengthen leadership knowledge and skills while providing students with avenues for growth and further development. In other words, the leadership internship experience bears the potential of positively influencing the development of participating students as leaders further highlighting the importance of designing and implementing leadership development courses and/or programs that allow participants to not only learn about leadership but to also practice leadership and reflect on their experiences.

The noted utility of the internship and its implementation may provide leadership educators with impactful strategies for facilitating transformational leadership learning (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Finally, the assessment of leadership in practice is critical to deciding the next steps for instructional design. Comprehensive assessment of leadership development programs deepens our understanding of the types of developmental experiences that can foster leadership skills, thus assisting us in creating challenging educational environments (Brungardt, 1997) and offering "a more sophisticated and intentional educational experience for learners" (Jenkins & Allen, 2017, p. 54).

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