

LEADERSHIP EDUCATION BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: Characteristics of Student Affairs Leadership Educators

Abstract

Currently, more students receive leadership education from student affairs offerings than academic leadership courses. Using two simultaneous Delphi panels, Group A – 17 student affairs managers and Group B – 20 student affairs preparatory program faculty members, this study sought to identify the characteristics of a student affairs leadership educator. While there was agreement (93.8%, $n = 32$) that student affairs practitioners are leadership educators, there was a disconnect between the two panels in how leadership education should be demonstrated within the context of student affairs. These findings support previous research that student affairs practitioners and preparatory program faculty disagree on the characteristics needed to be a successful student affairs practitioner and expands the impact of these findings into the area of leadership education.

Introduction

From academic programs to co-curricular and extra-curricular leadership development programs, students have a wide choice of leadership development opportunities. Student affairs practitioners have increased flexibility in providing leadership education because they do not face the limitations of classroom availability, course enrollment management, or faculty teaching rotations that curricular leadership programs face. Consequently, the number of students engaged in co-curricular leadership programs and initiatives compared to the number engaged in the academic study of leadership reflects that only a small portion of the leadership learning happening on a college campus happens in a formal classroom (Allen & Hartman, 2009; Brungardt, 1996; Hartman, Allen, & Miguel, 2015; Huber, 2002).

With varying durations, rigor, and theoretical grounding, there is a leadership development opportunity to match a range of student needs and expectations. However, there is not a commonly accepted definition of leadership education at the collegiate level or how to achieve it (Brungardt, 1996; Jenkins & Owen, 2016; Sowcik, Lindsey, & Rosch, 2012). But there is agreement in that leadership learning transcends the formal classroom (Burns, 1995; Buschlen & Guthrie, 2014; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Hartman et al., 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Jenkins & Owen, 2016), and that the leadership learning occurring outside the classroom can be of equal value to a student's leadership learning occurring within the classroom (Buschlen & Guthrie, 2014; Nelson, 2010). Yet, a challenge is that leadership educators in academic or co-curricular settings do not have a systematic approach to follow for teaching or developing leadership (Northouse, 2019; Rosch,

Spencer, & Hoag, 2017). Instead, leadership education tends to be grounded in what the individual educator believes is leadership (Hartman, et al., 2015) and what they deem important to know for that specific context.

Initially having a student affairs practitioner teach what they believe is leadership does not seem problematic, but the larger issue arises once it is understood that formal leadership studies coursework is not routinely a part of a student affairs preparatory master's degree program (Rosch et al., 2017), and leadership education is not seen as a primary learning objective of said programs (Nelson, 2010). Consequently, practitioners come to the profession of student affairs with a variety of industry and educational training and experiences (Coffey, 2010; Jenkins, 2012; Jenkins & Owen, 2016; O'Brien, 2018; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

While there is measurable evidence of the significant growth of collegiate leadership programs in recent years, little research has been conducted regarding the background, preparation, or competency of collegiate leadership educators either within or external to the classroom (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Jenkins, 2012; Jenkins & Owen, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore and identify the characteristics of a collegiate student affairs leadership educator. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Do student affairs practitioners and preparatory program directors view student affairs practitioners as leadership educators, and
2. How do student affairs practitioners and preparatory program directors identify student affairs leadership educators?

Literature Review

Leadership education is not exclusive to academic,

credit-bearing leadership studies programs (Buschlen & Guthrie, 2014; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Hartman et al., 2015; Jenkins & Owen, 2016; Roberts, 2007). Although the academic pursuit of leadership as a college major or minor is still an emerging discipline (Jenkins, 2012; Keating, Rosch, & Burgoon, 2014; Rosch et al., 2017), the opportunities for leadership education associated with student affairs programmatic efforts and activities are much more established (Brungardt, 1996; Burns, 1995). Without the constraints of a formal classroom or academic program, student affairs-sponsored leadership education opportunities have a much greater reach across campus. They tend to be "optimal for the practice of leadership" (Rosch et al., 2017, p. 130) and provide a natural laboratory wherein students can practice and explore their leadership capabilities while in a controlled and somewhat low-risk environment (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Nelson, 2010). Subsequently, much of what a majority of college students learn about leadership happens outside of any academic leadership course (Roberts, 2007; Rost & Barker, 2000). Yet, research is limited regarding leadership educators (Jenkins, 2012; Jenkins & Owen, 2016), especially those in student affairs.

On college campuses, leadership education occurs primarily in either a curricular or a co-curricular setting (Dungy, 2003). As Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) wrote, "co-curricular leadership education includes programs, activities, and services that occur outside the classroom environment, where students do not earn an academic grade or credit" (p. 7). Alternatively, curricular leadership education happens within the context of a credit-bearing course. The National Leadership Education Research Agenda values both contexts (Andenoro et al., 2013).

Regardless of the context, the central focus of leadership education is the promotion of leadership learning, where leadership is conceptualized as an amalgamation of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors (Northouse, 2019). Truly, as Kezar,

Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin (2006) noted, "leadership is a complex, dynamic phenomenon with few quick answers or easy solutions. . . It is a longer-term investment" (p. 158). Thus, leadership education is the means through which individuals who are committed to and engaged in the leadership process are able to learn, hone, and practice these leadership competencies over time (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Nelson, 2010; Northouse, 2019). The goal is to help individuals share accountability as they navigate a progressively interconnected world (Huber, 2002).

Today, leadership is commonly seen as a relational process between leaders and followers who collectively work to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2019). Although an academic discipline unto itself, leadership also cuts across disciplines, industries, levels within organizations, and communities (Huber, 2002). Therefore, the enhancement of leadership education should be a concern beyond the academic discipline of leadership alone (Burns, 1995).

Multiple studies have shown that one way to learn leadership is through first-hand experience (Brungardt, 1996; Buschlen & Guthrie, 2014; Conger, 1992). Historically, leadership was learned at the college level in one of three ways – teaching in the liberal arts tradition, programs with a multidisciplinary approach, and programs/initiatives within a division of student affairs, of which the most common is student affairs (Burns, 1995; Rost & Barker, 2000). Thus, by encouraging students to engage in both formal and informal educational opportunities, leadership educators are able to create, develop, and sustain an environment conducive to students' leadership learning (Thompson, 2013).

If one submits that leadership can be learned, it follows that leadership can also be taught (Brungardt, 1996; Harris & Cullen, 2007; Northouse, 2019; Parks, 2005). But without a universally accepted definition of leadership, or consensus on the development process to become an effective leader or where leadership programs should be housed (Rosch et al., 2017), what is it that leadership educators should teach? Hartman et al. (2015) stated that unlike other

disciplines, where there is an agreed upon structure and course of study, leadership education has very little. Consequently, leadership educators cannot rely on a singular framework upon which to build.

The lack of an agreed upon structure is compounded by the considerable breadth of what currently is labeled as a collegiate leadership program and their varied objectives (Rosch et al., 2017). Also, a division of student affairs tends to house the majority of these widely diverse leadership programs (Rost & Barker, 2000), yet student affairs practitioners typically do not complete coursework in leadership nor in how to effectively teach leadership to their students (Wright, 2007). Thus, it can be challenging for educators within student affairs to know the crucial leadership concepts they should teach (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011).

Moreover, the lack of credentialing of leadership educators also causes challenges when desiring to examine and evaluate leadership education (Roberts, 2007). As Jenkins and Owen (2016) stated, "little scholarship exists providing any direction on preparatory activities" for those who engage in leadership education (p. 101). While some efforts have been made to standardize aspects of leadership education, such as context, conceptual framework, content, teaching and learning, and outcomes and assessments (ILA, 2009), there is little in the literature to address leadership educator preparation (Jenkins & Owen, 2016; Wright, 2007). The closest attempt for the context of student affairs comes in a list of desired professional behaviors for those who direct or coordinate co-curricular leadership programs (see Figure 1). But the list does not address the need for formal education, training, or how student affairs practitioners are to develop the characteristics needed to be effective leadership educators (Jenkins & Owen, 2016).

Leadership educators should have:

- Knowledge of the history and current trends in leadership theories, models, and philosophies;
- An understanding of the contextual nature of leadership;
- Knowledge of organizational development, group dynamics, strategies for change, and principles of community;
- Knowledge of how social identities and dimensions of diversity influence leadership;
- The ability to work with a diverse range of students;
- The ability to create, implement, and evaluate student learning as a result of leadership programs;
- The ability to effectively organize learning opportunities that are consistent with students' stages of development;
- The ability to use reflection in helping students understand leadership concepts;
- The ability to develop and assess student learning outcomes.

Figure 1. . "Standards for Student Leadership Programs" suggested competencies for leadership educators (as cited in Jenkins & Owen, 2016)

While much of the growth and development students experience during their time in higher education comes through academic coursework (King, 2003), college is also a time of significant personal growth and development. Divisions of student affairs are tasked with the primary responsibility to facilitate, monitor, and assess the holistic, personal growth and development of students (Coffey, 2010). A division of student affairs is defined as "the administrative unit on a college campus responsible for those out-of-classroom staff members, programs, functions, and services that contribute to the education and development of students" (Javinar, 2000, p. 85), and includes: student unions, student organizations, student wellness services, multicultural services, dining, leadership development and civic engagement, and housing (for residential campuses), etc. (Kuk & Banning, 2009).

Many of the positions we currently ascribe to a division of student affairs began with the establishment of the residential, colonial colleges (Nuss, 2003). However, unlike modern institutions of higher education, the faculty had the responsibility to oversee all aspects of student discipline and guardianship (Nuss, 2003). This idea of *in loco parentis*, the legal concept of the college serving as

authority in place of the parents, was pervasive. But as the non-academic demands of students increased, the faculty increasingly claimed those issues were not within their purview. Administrators soon realized students were engaging in extracurricular activities without supervision or assistance (Coffey, 2010), and that students' development and improvement extended beyond the classroom (Hunter & Murray, 2007). Subsequently, "student affairs emerged out of the reluctance of faculty to become involved in the 'hands-on' aspect of college student life" (Blake, 2007, p.72).

Over time, the roles and focus of student affairs practitioners have shifted from a service mindset, (e.g. staffing dining halls and overseeing residence halls) to one of education and development. But, the focus of all student affairs positions has always been the development of the whole person (Nuss, 2003). Accordingly, most divisions of student affairs have two basic goals: "(1) to provide cocurricular programs, activities, and other learning opportunities that contribute to . . . students by meeting their academic, social, recreational, physical, emotional, and moral development needs and (2) to promote self-direction and leadership among those students" who are involved on campus (Javinar, 2000, p. 86). Hence,

leadership education became an integral aspect of student development (Burns, 1995).

Historically there were clear demarcations between collegiate educators and support staff. Educators were those who resided primarily in the classroom, while support staff, such as student affairs practitioners, were seen as the enabling, hand-holding, support system of college life (Moore & Marsh, 2007; Rogers, 1991). While the traditional view of student affairs practitioners is one of nonessential service provider, a more contemporary view sees student affairs practitioners as educators who work to help students persist through college to graduation (Moore & Marsh, 2007). Thereby, "student affairs professionals [became] teachers by design rather than default" (Blake, 2007, p. 66).

The shift in the mental model that student affairs practitioners are teachers by design did not happen overnight. Arguably, learning has always been at the core of student affairs work. Yet, the focus on personal, social, and emotional student development, primarily outside the classroom, had many college administrators and others questioning the value and intentionality of that learning, especially during times of constricting resources and growing calls for fiscal accountability (Coffey, 2010; Dickerson et al., 2011). No longer could one merely assume learning occurred. Based on a national study in 2004, Herdlein reported that chief student affairs officers are looking for new student affairs professionals who have a firm understanding of how student affairs is a partner in the teaching and learning process. For student affairs practitioners, this means increased intentionality in the learning process without sacrificing their commitment to holistic student success and development (Coffey, 2010; Woodard, Love, & Komives, 2000).

As Hunter and Murray (2007) noted, teacher preparation and leadership studies courses traditionally are not part of a student affairs preparatory program curriculum. Hence, student affairs practitioners are not formally taught to be educators nor are they formally taught leadership.

Despite this fact, increasingly, student affairs practitioners must see themselves as educators in all they do. Since learning is not restricted to time spent in a formal classroom, student affairs practitioners have a vital role to play in detailing the student learning occurring on college campuses (Blake, 2007). In times of increased scrutiny over the purpose and cost of higher education, any program, initiative, or office that cannot provide empirical evidence regarding the impact they have on the learning process, may not survive future reductions in resources (Blake, 2007; Ellerston & Thoennes, 2007; Lovell & Kosten, 2000).

Methods

This study was part of a larger study to elicit and refine group opinions or judgements, so a classic Delphi approach was used (Buriak & Shinn, 1989; Dalkey, 1969a; Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975; Franklin & Hart, 2007; Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The Delphi technique is an iterative process of controlled-feedback interactions between the researcher(s) and their purposively selected panel of experts (Buriak & Shinn, 1989; Schmidt, 1997), to "permit a carefully restricted exchange of information while reducing the process loss which might occur during traditional group interaction" (Rohrbaugh, 1979, p. 76). Furthermore, the Delphi approach "capture[s] the areas of collective knowledge . . . [while] forc[ing] new ideas to emerge" (Franklin & Hart, 2007, p. 238). In order to elicit a wide range of opinions, we engaged a diverse group of qualified experts within the field of student affairs (Dalkey 1969a; Delbecq et al., 1975; Rayens & Hahn, 2000).

Population

Student affairs practitioners and preparatory program faculty disagree on the core competencies needed to be an effective student affairs practitioner (Hyman, 1985; Miles, 2007). Consequently, to understand the characteristics of an entry-level student affairs leadership educator, one needs to examine both an academic and experiential perspective (Herdlein

Riefler, & Mrowka, 2013; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007). Thus, the appropriate population needed was two-fold. First, were the student affairs practitioners/managers responsible for hiring and training entry-level employees. Second, were student affairs/higher education administration preparatory program directors/coordinators responsible for curriculum design and instruction.

Student affairs practitioners who hire and train entry-level employees are typically considered managers and spend significant time helping their staff navigate institutional policies and the processes of 'how' to put theory to practice (Kuk et al., 2007). As the professionals who work most closely with entry-level student affairs practitioners, student affairs managers provide a unique perspective of the characteristics needed to be successful as an entry-level student affairs practitioner. As Burkard, Cole, Ott, and Stoflet (2005) noted, "no one may be better positioned to help us understand the necessary entry-level competencies of a student affairs professional than those individuals who recruit, select, hire, and supervise such staff members" (p. 286).

But student affairs managers alone do not influence pre-service student affairs practitioners. Those who coordinate student affairs preparatory programs also provide a valuable perspective into the characteristics needed to be successful in this profession (Hyman, 1985). Preparatory program coordinators tend to focus on the theoretical and research basis of the profession, the 'why' of the profession (Herdlein, et al., 2013; Kuk et al., 2007).

A master's degree is generally required, and usually preferred, for full-time employment as a student affairs practitioner (Nelson, 2010). However, not all student affairs preparatory programs are the same. These programs vary in length of study (one or two years), curriculum delivery (residential, hybrid of in-person and on-line, and entirely on-line), and degree offered (graduate certificate, M.S., M.A., or M.Ed.). Traditionally, a student affairs preparatory program is a two-year, residential master's program with a required clinical paraprofessional practice such as

an assistantship, internship, and/or practicum. Thus, only program directors/coordinators of programs that met the traditional student affairs preparatory program profile were included.

Although the findings of this study are directed toward entry-level student affairs practitioners, they were not included in the population as entry-level student affairs practitioners do not always know the characteristics needed to be successful in their chosen profession (Roberts, 2003). Additionally, while entry-level student affairs practitioners are expected to use their graduate education from their first day on the job, research has shown that they may not be sufficiently prepared to do so (Herdlein, Kline, Boquard, & Haddad, 2010; Nelson, 2010).

Sample

When dealing with group opinions, the common perspective is the larger the group, the better the outcomes. Yet, Dalkey (1969b) reported that groups consisting of at least 13 individuals, satisfactorily answered questions of process reliability with mean correlations greater than or equal to 0.80. Attrition over the course of the study was expected; therefore, additional participants were recruited so that by the final round each respondent group would have a minimum of 13 members.

Selection for Inclusion in the Delphi. Participants were purposively selected for each Delphi panel based on their substantial experience or expertise in the subject matter in question (Delbecq et al., 1975; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Morgan, King, Rudd, & Kaufman, 2013; Rayens & Hahn, 2000). The weight of their experience or expertise was such that their opinions are seen as credible within their discipline or profession and can be used as representative of said discipline or profession (Delbecq, et al., 1975; Franklin & Hart, 2007). The preeminent academic journals for the premier student affairs professional development organizations, NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), were

searched for the creation of the expert panels.

Criteria for Inclusion on the Panels. A sampling frame was used for selection of both expert panels. Panelists needed to have demonstrated experience or expertise in (a) student affairs as a profession and (b) the leadership development of college students. For this study, the broadest definition of leadership development was used. Additionally, demonstrated experience or expertise was determined as meeting at least three of the following five criteria:

1. Three or more years of experience as a full-time student affairs practitioner or researcher
2. Three or more years of experience with college student leadership development
3. Three or more years supervising entry-level student affairs practitioners
4. Three or more years of experience as a preparatory student affairs program director/coordinator
5. Three or more years teaching in a preparatory student affairs master's program (2 or more cohorts of students)

Potential participants were identified by first examining the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* (NASPA) and the *Journal of College Student Development* (ACPA), between the years of 2008 and 2018. Limiting the search to these two journals produced a pool of student affairs professionals well below the needed threshold to constitute a full Delphi panel for either respondent group. Therefore, while maintaining the original intent of this study, the search was expanded to include the *Journal of Leadership Education*, *College Student Journal*, *NASPA Journal*, *College Student Affairs Journal*, and *Research and Practice in Assessment*.

The focus of this search was authors of articles related to leadership education in a student affairs context or necessary student affairs competencies. The identified authors were checked against the participant criteria and those who met the criteria

were invited via email to participate in this study. These authors were also asked to nominate a student affairs colleague or fellow student affairs preparatory program director/coordinator who met or exceeded the selection criteria, which were also included in the email. All nominated individuals were evaluated against the selection criteria, and those who met or exceeded the criteria were invited to participate. Five student affairs preparatory program directors/coordinators were nominated, four of whom agreed to participate. Six student affairs practitioners/managers were nominated, all of whom agreed to participate. Invitations to participate ceased when each panel had 17-20 unique participants.

Through the search and nomination process, 32 individuals were identified for Group A – Student Affairs Practitioners/Managers, and 17 agreed to participate. All 17 participants were employed at public institutions at the time of the study and had experience in a variety of functional areas within student affairs ranging from residence life to the dean of students and from leadership and service offices to the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. Two members of Group A did not complete this survey. Fifty-seven individuals were invited via email to join Group B – Student Affairs Preparatory Program Directors/Coordinators, but only 10 agreed to participate. Thus, the online membership roster of ACPA was searched for preparatory student affairs program directors/coordinators who manage two-year, residential master's programs with a required clinical practice. Expanding the search yielded the additional names needed to gain a full Delphi panel for Group B consisting of 20 individuals. Both public and private institutions were represented. All 20 participants held a higher education/student affairs faculty appointment at the time of the study. Three members of Group B did not complete the survey.

General demographic information of the participants was not collected, as the Delphi approach focuses on building consensus and not the identification of individual differences. In Delphi studies, participants are described and identified by the meeting of a pre-determined criteria of expertise (Dalkey, 1969b).

Therefore, how expertise is operationalized for that study serves as the minimum threshold to which participants are identified and described. For this study, expertise was described as meeting at least three of the five criteria for inclusion previously mentioned.

Instrumentation

Previous research has shown that student affairs practitioners and preparatory program coordinators/faculty view the characteristics of student affairs practitioners differently (Hyman, 1985; Kuk et al., 2007; Miles, 2007). Consequently, two separate Delphi panels were conducted simultaneously, one for each respondent group. Both panels were asked the same open-ended questions, which were distributed via email with a personalized link to the online Qualtrics survey. Open-ended questions were used to maximize the range of responses; thereby increasing the likelihood of producing the most important items (Schmidt, 1997). Franklin and Hart (2007) found that it is important to protect the anonymity of Delphi panelists in an effort to guard the integrity of the data and to allow “panelists to share their ideas freely without fear of embarrassment or ridicule by their peers” (p. 242). Accordingly, all communication between study participants was conducted individually between the lead researcher and each participant. Participants were given a fourteen-day window to respond for each round, with a reminder emailed at day 10, and again at day 13, as needed.

Research Approach and Analysis

A qualitative research design centered on the idea that reality is constructed through individual's own experiences was used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An inductive process was undertaken, as data were gathered from the study participants and then analyzed to identify each unique idea or concept. As we desired to better understand and describe the characteristics of a student affairs leadership

educator, we chose an interpretive design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Content analysis was selected as the methodological frame because this study sought to explore systematically the attitudes and perspectives of those engaged in the education and training of student affairs practitioners. As Bryman (2012) noted, content analysis enables researchers to infer meaning through systematic and impartial identification of the data. The responses were analyzed, and then coded for thematic content. By using this open coding process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), we were able to dissect each participant's response and then reconstitute the data into potential themes and sub-themes separately for Groups A and B.

Research Quality and Trustworthiness. Maintaining trustworthiness is vital in qualitative research. Dependability was increased through an audit trail, where all data were separated by Delphi panel and coded accordingly. Participant responses from Group A were coded 1 to 15. Participant responses from Group B were coded A to Q. The use of representative quotes for each research theme or category gives voice to all participants in the study and provides potential for transferability of the study. Credibility was achieved through peer debriefing with one who graduated from a student affairs preparatory program and has nine years of experience as a student affairs leadership educator; and use of a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After review of the data, the peer reviewer agreed with the classification and categorization of the data.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note the importance of researchers sharing their background and perspectives to provide a lens through which to view the study's credibility. The lead researcher's previous experience includes 15 years serving as a student affairs leadership educator and supervisor within divisions of student affairs across the United States. Their scholarly knowledge of and experience in leadership education were used to scrutinize the data (Franklin & Hart, 2007; Krippendorff, 2004;

Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They were cognizant of their previous experience and worked to remain objective; however, they acknowledge the possibility that their previous experiences and views may have influenced how the data were categorized and analyzed.

Findings

Both student affairs managers and preparatory faculty members view student affairs practitioners as leadership educators. Thirteen of the 15 participants (92.9%) in Group A held this view. Sixteen of the 17 participants (94.1%) in Group B responded likewise. Only one participant per context-specific expert panel, or 6.3% of the total respondents, reported that student affairs practitioners were not leadership educators.

All participants were then asked to provide their definition of a student affairs leadership educator. Influenced by their previous experience working with student affairs practitioners, graduate students in student affairs preparatory programs, and college student leadership development, collectively the participant's definitions of student affairs leadership educators were organized into two main categories: those with direct interaction with student leaders and those whose job descriptions included leadership-focused initiatives. Only Group A, had a third major category emerge, which was previous formal experience with leadership.

In terms of how leadership educators are characterized, one common theme emerged from the two participant groups: leadership educators mentor students. For Group A, three additional themes emerged. Student affairs leadership educators are characterized as those who: (a) have a theoretical understanding of leadership, (b) practice integrative learning, and (c) use student development theory in their roles as student organization advisors or student employee supervisors. For Group B, no additional themes emerged.

Group A: Student Affairs Practitioners/
Managers.

Definition of Leadership Educator. Student Affairs Practitioners/Managers (Group A) viewed leadership education as an intentional act, requiring leadership educators to put theory to practice as they encourage and support their students' leadership learning and development. These intentional acts are associated with leadership educators having direct interactions with students and/or having job duties for providing co-curricular leadership programming. For a majority of participants, opportunities for leadership learning and development were not exclusive to students in positional leadership roles. Rather, the Group A participants shared the attitude that as a learned behavior, leadership is available to anyone willing to put the time and effort in to develop their skills and abilities. Several of the respondents provided these insights through the following definitions:

- [A leadership educator is] someone who actively engages in interactions with students to develop them as leaders. (2)
- Leadership educators focus their interactions with students toward skill building and developing personal awareness. (11)
- [A leadership educator is] anyone who works in student affairs directly with students engaging in personal, career, academic, and leadership development initiatives, programs, or services. (13)

While many of the members of Group A took an emergent view of leadership, there were two participants who provided an alternative perspective. For these two, student affairs leadership educators have a primary responsibility to guide and train students who serve as positional leaders. This sentiment is expressed in the

following definitions.

- [A leadership educator is] someone who in their student affairs role has had direct contact with student leaders. (2)
- Student activities staff are leadership educators if they create ways for students to reflect on their leadership behavior while serving as a student organization leader. If they disregard this important part of student activity or student organization participation, then they are failing in the leadership educator role. (3)

The second emergent theme was that student affairs leadership educators have leadership programming as a key part of their job responsibilities. This idea reinforces how leadership education is an intentional act and not merely a byproduct of working with students. Also, these leadership development programming opportunities provide the setting and circumstances in which student affairs leadership educators are able to have direct and meaningful interactions with students. These insights are demonstrated in the following statements.

- [A leadership educator is] any professional who is responsible for actively providing leadership development programs for students. (8)
- [A leadership educator is] someone who is working in short-term and long-term leadership programming that includes creating, participating, facilitating programs and classes based in the values of leadership that focus on the growth of the individual and how that individual influences a group towards positive change. (12)
- Student Affairs staff, as educators,

should be contributing specifically to this leadership development [developing students to be future leaders] in very tangible ways. (9)

Notwithstanding the focus of providing formal leadership development programming as part of one's job duties, Group A participants also detailed that student affairs practitioners can choose to incorporate leadership development concepts into how they perform their jobs. Thus, a student affairs leadership educator can be anyone who identifies as one, has the desire to assist students on their leadership journey, and infuses leadership development concepts into job duties. One participant noted:

- I remind my colleagues they all have the responsibility and potential to be leadership educators - if they put the effort and consideration into it. (3)

This idea that student affairs leadership educators need a solid foundation in leadership concepts is reinforced in these responses.

- [A leadership educator is] one who utilizes human development theory and leadership theory in their practice as they work to shape and mold the engaged student leaders with whom they work. (7)
- [A leadership educator is] anyone who intentionally considers and includes leadership development as part of their work with students. (3)

A third theme emerged in Group A, that leadership educators have previous experience with leadership. For one practitioner, leadership educators had prior experience in a positional leadership role. This participant noted a leadership educator was one who:

- [H]as past experience in some type

of leadership role (can be varied – student leader, committee leader, title leader, etc.) (2)

Although previous leadership experience brings unique insights, another participant responded that a conceptual understanding of leadership was most important. For this participant, a leadership educator is:

- Someone with some sort of formalized class, training, or knowledge about basic leadership theories. (2)

Characteristics of Leadership Educator. Participants were also asked to identify the characteristics of a student affairs leadership educator. For Group A, one theme emerged: leadership educators mentor students. Three sub-themes emerged. Student affairs leadership educators are those who: (a) have a theoretical understanding of leadership, (b) practice integrative learning, and (c) use student development theory in their roles as student organization advisors or student employee supervisors.

Student affairs practitioners/managers believe leadership educators possess a theoretical understanding of leadership. Included in this understanding is an appreciation for the various components of leadership development and how social identity influences one's leadership conceptualization, as detailed in the following statements. A leadership educator:

- [Needs] knowledge of leadership theory. (1)
- Understand[s] identity development -- social identities including leader identity. (1)
- Understands the difference between leadership training, education, and development. (1)

- Understands how to help students find the answer to [the question] "leadership for what?" (1)

Even the lone practitioner who did not believe student affairs practitioners are leadership educators concurred with their colleague. They responded that leadership educators are,

- One[s] who understand leadership theory and practice (6)

The participants of Group A consider student affairs leadership educators as the conduits bridging what students are learning in and out of their classrooms. This view is demonstrated in the following statements.

- Through connections of what is occurring inside and outside of the classroom, [student affairs] practitioners are vibrant components of leadership education. (14)
- [A leadership educator] integrates student leadership competencies and learning outcomes throughout their programs, infrastructure, and initiatives. (5)
- [A leadership educator] can deploy that knowledge [knowledge of leadership theory] in executing co-curricular opportunities. (1)
- [A leadership educator] can facilitate and teach. (1)
- [Leadership educators] understand some instructional design [principles] for retreats and conferences. (1)

Once again, the participant who does not believe student affairs practitioners are leadership educators agreed with their colleagues as they mentioned,

- [Leadership educators] can engage students in learning through designing experiential opportunities

that produce results around building leadership capacity towards producing positive change or influence. (6)

Student affairs managers described leadership educators as those who use student development theory and reflective practices in their jobs to guide students through the development process. As a student organization advisor or student employee supervisor, student affairs leadership educators are able to mentor student leaders. A majority of Group A participants shared these views in the following statements:

- Student affairs professionals can act both as coaches and as guides, offering intentional opportunities for intentional reflection and skill-building. (11)
- [A leadership educator] guides students in all areas of their co-curricular experiences fostering social belonging. (4)
- [A leadership educator] provides scenarios where students are learning, practicing, and receiving feedback in these [identity development, self-efficacy, and working with others]. (10)
- [A leadership educator] knows how to give feedback and does so. (1)
- They [student affairs practitioners] create ways for students to reflect on their leadership behavior while serving as a student organization leader. (3)
- [Leadership educators are] some [student affairs practitioners] who supervise student employees. (7)
- [Leadership educators] utilize leadership identity development and student leadership development theories and concepts into their daily work and interactions with students. (5)

Group B: Student Affairs Preparatory Program Directors/Coordinators.

Definition of Leadership Educator. Student Affairs Preparatory Program Coordinators/Directors (Group B) identified leadership education as a specialized area of expertise within student affairs, making leadership education a functional area much like housing or career services. Thus, leadership educators are those with specific positions or job titles and are responsible for the development of leadership capacity and competency in both students and professional colleagues. As well, a majority of respondents in Group B saw leadership education as applicable only to those students who are, or aspire to be, positional leaders. Due to the specialized nature of their job responsibilities, leadership educators work closely with student leaders while providing opportunities for leadership learning.

When describing the direct interactions leadership educators have with student leaders, three sub-themes emerged. Leadership educators serve as guides outside the classroom, model effective leadership competencies, and train student leaders. In terms of the first sub-theme of serving as a guide outside the classroom, a leadership educator is:

- Anyone who uses positional, referent, or expert power to actively guide and inform colleagues and students on practices that promote effective leadership (motivating toward a common goal, intended outcome). (I)
- An individual who helps college students foster leadership skills through out-of-classroom experiences. (O)
- Our work is leadership, so students are exposed to leadership in practice as we engage with our students. (G)

- Someone whose primary role includes either working directly with students or working to directly impact students. (F)

But participants in Group B indicated that a leadership educator's responsibility did not end with merely guiding students through a developmental process. Instead, they repeatedly mentioned the need for leadership educators to model the competencies of effective leadership they were teaching their students. This philosophy is shown in the following quotes:

- The role of leadership educator may refer to the leadership role the Student Affairs professional plays on campus and, thus as a role model, demonstrates to students what it means to serve as a leader. (N)
- Student Affairs professionals serve as leadership educators in their day-to-day engagement with students through content delivery in workshops, advising student organizations, role modeling, problem-solving conversations, and mentoring. (G)
- [For student affairs professionals] bringing a leadership mindset is critical as they are leading students, their unit, their own work, etc. (F)
- One who through advising, modeling, counseling, and directing enables students to grow and develop as leaders. (K)

Providing leadership training was also an important way for leadership educators to interact with student leaders. Two participants mentioned the need for leadership training.

- One who may need to impart leadership training or leadership competencies upon student leaders. (L)

- One who helps to encourage students to understand their roles as leaders. (D)

With regard to the second emergent theme, the leadership-focus of their job descriptions, three sub-themes emerged from Group B. For these respondents, leadership educators facilitate learning, use reflective practice and develop leadership competencies in both non-students and students. As to facilitating learning, leadership educators:

- Are helping students become leaders and learn about leadership theory and practice. (H)
- Are those campus administrators who are committed to educating students both formally and informally. (N)
- May refer to teaching students about becoming leaders. (N)
- May not include the formal role of a classroom educator [in their practice], their daily work with students focuses on teaching, challenging, and supporting -- the hallmarks of an educator. (N)
- [Are] one[s] who work with emerging professionals in the field to introduce key literature/concepts necessary for practice. (C)

One teaching strategy mentioned repeatedly by Group B participants, was that of reflective practice to enhance the learning process. Therefore, leadership educators are:

- Those who engage students in reflective practice around issues of leadership. (D)
- Any campus leader and/or administrator who thoughtfully engages theory, personal experience, and reflective insight to support student success on a college/university campus. (A)

Student affairs leadership educators also have a responsibility to develop leadership competencies in others. This development process begins with self. Once they have demonstrated competence themselves, then they work with emerging student affairs professionals, and expand their efforts to other members of the campus community. Thereby leadership educators fulfill and magnify their job responsibilities to provide leadership-focused education and programming. The following quotes capture this sentiment.

- One who may need to develop leadership qualities/abilities in order to more effectively lead students. (L)
- Leadership is a critical skill for the 21st century, and every person should develop the skills, dispositions, and knowledge that can help them realize their leadership potential. (B)
- One who works with emerging professionals in the field (i.e., master's and Ph.D. students) to help develop leadership competencies. (C)
- The profession of student affairs is about creating conditions to cultivate human flourishing; education about the choices these leaders make to foster human flourishing is required. (Q)
- Any campus leader and/or administrator who trains others in the campus community to thoughtfully engage theory, personal experience, and reflective insight to support student success on a college/university campus. (A)

Once the leadership educator has developed the necessary effective leadership competencies in themselves, then they are able to develop the competencies in their students. This view

was shared by several respondents as is noted in the following quotes. A leadership educator is:

- [One who understands] the first step in leadership education is self-leadership. This may be the most common form of student affairs leadership education. But it soon progresses to students leading groups, programs, and teams. (K)
- One who encourages students to develop as leaders in the context of student affairs engagement. (D)
- A professional who is committed to help develop the leadership capacity and efficacy of students and colleagues with whom they work. (B)
- Any HESA [higher education student affairs] educator with a formal job position working with students in any capacity that builds leadership-related skills including any general learning and development opportunity to develop individuals who can potentially contribute to society. (P)
- A professional who works with students to develop their innate abilities to inspire others. (E)

Characteristics of Leadership Educator. Participants in Group B were asked also to identify the characteristics of a student affairs leadership educator. Only one theme emerged: leadership educators mentor students. Group B participants underscored the developmental, helpful, and action-oriented aspects of mentoring students, as these four respondents noted.

- The student affairs leadership educator should be prepared to help the student through an understanding of the process [types of leadership choices, assess effectiveness of their

activities and reflect on any learning that occurred] and pitfalls (K)

- [A leadership educator is] someone who has the ability to mutually construct desired goals and outcomes with others. (J)
- [A leadership educator is] someone who has vision. (J)
- [All] student affairs practitioners have the responsibility to lead by example. (Q)

An alternative perspective was shared by the one Student Affairs Preparatory Program Director/Coordinator who did not believe student affairs practitioners were leadership educators when the person mentioned:

- A leadership educator can work with student affairs, but they have a passion for leadership development, a good understanding of contemporary leadership theories, may conduct research or contribute to scholarship on leadership, teach leadership classes, present on leadership, and/or attend leadership-centered conferences (ALE, LEI, ILA, etc.). (M)

Conclusions and Discussion

In all, there was overwhelming agreement among the expert panels (93.8%, $n = 32$) that student affairs practitioners are leadership educators. Only one participant per context-specific Delphi panel, or 6.3% of the respondents, disagreed. Nonetheless, there was agreement within these two dissenting voices. They both framed a leadership educator in a classical sense: those who know and practice leadership theories, teach academic credit-bearing leadership courses, and/or conduct leadership research; not typical job responsibilities of entry-level student affairs practitioners.

There was also agreement that student affairs

leadership educators are those who have direct interaction with student leaders and whose job descriptions include leadership-focused initiatives. But the defining characteristic is that student affairs leadership educators mentor students. However, there were differences between the two groups in who was meant by 'student leaders,' how leadership education should be demonstrated in a student affairs context, and who should be mentored. These differences support previous research that student affairs practitioners and preparatory program faculty view effectiveness within the profession differently and serve different roles in the preparation of student affairs practitioners (Burkard et al., 2005; Herdlein et al., 2013; Kuk et al., 2007).

For student affairs managers, 'student leader' was an inclusive term referring to any student interested in developing their leadership capacity. Thus, leadership education is an intentional act and leadership is deemed an emergent process. However, the student affairs preparatory program directors saw a 'student leader' as one currently holding, or aspiring to hold, a leadership position. To emphasize positional leaders as the only recipients of leadership education implies that for student affairs preparatory program faculty, leadership is assigned.

The differences continued into how leadership education should be demonstrated. For the student affairs managers, leadership education is not limited to any one specific functional area within a division of student affairs. Anyone who has the desire to assist students along their leadership journey or infuses leadership development into their job duties, regardless of job title, can be a leadership educator. Conversely, the student affairs preparatory program directors viewed leadership education as a specialized area of expertise or functional area within a division of student affairs. Thus, student affairs leadership educators are seen as experts with job-specific competence, to be called upon whenever a leadership development issue arises throughout the division, be it student, paraprofessional or professional colleague.

Elevating leadership education to a functional area within a division of student affairs demonstrates the importance the institution places on leadership development. Having a central location to refer others to can be effective in promoting a common perspective; however, divisions of student affairs are large, complex organizations with a variety of needs. If these leadership offices are not appropriately staffed, having all student affairs leadership development initiatives rest on the shoulders of a few can be overwhelming and can lead to professional burnout. More importantly, having a centralized leadership office may be interpreted that leadership education is only the responsibility of a few, which directly contradicts the viewpoint of those on the frontlines of student affairs work.

While, both groups did agree that a student affairs leadership educator should be characterized as a mentor, there was a difference in how mentoring should be displayed. For the student affairs managers, leadership educators are mentors exclusively to their students. But the student affairs preparatory program directors had a much more inclusive view of mentoring. They responded that student affairs leadership educators have a responsibility to mentor not only their students, but also current and pre-service student affairs practitioners. This finding leads the researchers to ask, what characteristics constitute an effective mentor within a student affairs context?

These differences show a disconnect between those who teach pre-service student affairs practitioners in the classroom and those who teach 'on the job.' While their philosophical differences are warranted, this lack of unity contributes to the on-going gap between theory and practice. Theory influences practice and practice can offer valuable insight into how theory is presented in courses.

In efforts to help bridge this gap, three recommendations are presented. First, coordinate regular, intentional conversations between those who supervise graduate assistants, those who supervise entry-level student affairs practitioners,

and preparatory program faculty members. By counseling together as a team to discuss the competencies entry-level student affairs practitioners need as leadership educators, everyone benefits. Opportunities to reinforce learning occur as both student affairs practitioners and professors commit to strengthen their partnership in the teaching and learning processes of their students. Both student affairs managers and preparatory program faculty members influence the education, training, and development of entry-level student affairs practitioners. Therefore, a more focused collaboration, with both sides sharing their unique insights and perspectives, is needed if we are to train the next generation of effective student affairs leadership educators

Second, student affairs managers and preparatory program faculty should actively dialogue with their graduate students about the role student affairs practitioners have as leadership educators, regardless of functional area. Pre-service student affairs practitioners need a clear understanding of this expectation prior to entering the profession full-time, so they can take advantage of professional development and educational opportunities prior to graduation.

Finally, we recommend that leadership educators housed in academic departments and those housed in divisions of student affairs work together to build more collaborative partnerships as we endeavor to bring leadership theory to practice. Both contexts provide valuable perspectives and advance our understanding of leadership education. Thus, it benefits us all, and most importantly our students, to work in collaboration rather than in competition.

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