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Students' Perceptions Of Leadership Skills Gained At A County College

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP
SKILLS GAINED AT A COUNTY COLLEGE

By

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SKILLS GAINED AT A COUNTY COLLEGE

ABSTRACT

Many colleges offer leadership programs or multiple ways students can develop leadership skills like participation in student clubs or working on campus. Institutions do not always assess or evaluate where or how students learn leadership skills. This dissertation study investigated what leadership skills students are learning and where they learn them at a county college located in Central New Jersey. This study employed qualitative research methods where 9 students who participated were a sample of 45 students who participated in the county college's leadership development program. The 9 students first participated in a focus group interview about what leadership skills they were learning through participation in different activities. Students then participated in a one-on-one interview where they explained where they were learning what skills they developed. Interview questions reflected Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Leadership Practices and Commitments which was the conceptual framework for the study. Interviews were transcribed and coded to find themes. The research found four types of leadership skills students were learning including 1) Communication, 2) Confidence, 3) Encouragement, and 4) Teamwork. Each theme had four subtopics that informed these themes. This study demonstrated the importance of students becoming involved on campus by either working or participating in clubs so they can develop leadership skills.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Development of leadership skills is an important aspect of college for students. In higher education the need for students to develop leadership skills is imperative to prepare them for transferring to other universities and employment. Many colleges offer leadership programs and training to their students so they can learn the necessary skills to become quality leaders. Often, leadership skills, programs, or student's leadership experiences are not assessed after students graduate, leaving the institution not knowing if participants benefitted and enhanced their leadership skills (McDade & Lewis, 1994).

Every spring semester a county college in New Jersey offers their students the opportunity to participate in a leadership development program. Students apply to the program and are admitted by a committee made up of several college administrators. The leadership program, named the Student Leadership Collaborative, accepts up to fifty applicants. Students who apply to the program have participated in service learning student organizations, are members of student clubs, employees of the college, or students who are interested in developing their leadership skills. The Student Leadership Collaborative ran its fourth cohort during the spring semester in 2016.

Posner (2009) studied how college seniors participating in a leadership development program had grown from their freshman year to senior year and developed greater leadership skills compared to students who did not participate in the program. Posner's (2009) study focused on students who had four years to develop leadership skills. On the contrary, students who attend county college may only have one or two years to develop leadership skills effectively before graduating or transferring to a four year university. County colleges can be

described as two year colleges that offer an array of different certificate programs and associates degrees. Students can take one course for personal enjoyment or take part in a degree program that they can complete and transfer to a four year university. In almost every part of America a county college is always within an hour away. County colleges are served to help out the community and are mostly funded through the local or state government (AAAC, 2016).

Keys to success for students who attend county college are involvement in extracurricular activities and interactions with professors and peers (Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2005). County colleges provide students with the necessary skills to succeed; more impactful ways such as leadership development opportunities need to be examined in order for county colleges to gain a better understanding of skills gained other than academic. This research used the following leadership practices and commitments as the conceptual framework for this study:

Table 1

Leadership Practices & Commitments

Leadership Practice	Leadership Commitment
Model the Way	1. Find your voice by clarifying your personal values. 2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.
Inspire a Shared Vision	3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling activities. 4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
Challenge the Process	5. Search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow and improve. 6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.
Enable Others to Act	7. Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.

	8. Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion.
Encourage the Heart	9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. 10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 6)

Developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012), the leadership practices and commitments are behaviors that effective leaders use. Kouzes and Posner (2012) have researched leadership skills of effective leaders for many years and synthesized into the aforementioned. The practices and commitments are those of a transformational leader. Gallagher, Marshall, Pories, and Daugherty (2014) believed “the model of transformational leadership is ideal for educational institutions such as universities since it fits well with the ideals and goals associated with growth and improvement within academic institutions” (p. 47).

Statement of Problem

A county college in Central New Jersey conducts leadership training and provides leadership experiences, but does not understand student’s experience leadership. College leadership needs to understand in which settings students are experiencing leadership opportunities and how students perceive leadership. Development of leadership skills is vital as it promotes personal development (Urso & Sygielski, 2007). County colleges face challenges to keep students actively engaged in activities or participation in clubs and activities, making it difficult for students to develop leadership skills. Actively engaged students who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely stay in college until they have reached their academic goal (Kuh, 2001 as cited by Torres, 2008). In order for students to become actively engaged and become more involved, county college leaders need to understand how students perceive leadership skills in order for them to evaluate their leadership program and students experiences.

Program evaluation will help county college leaders understand what they can do to offer more leadership opportunities to their students.

County colleges are often more focused on developing underprepared students academically so that they are college-ready when they transfer to a four year university (Boroch, Hope, Smith, Gabriner, Mery, Johnstone, & Asera, 2010). Students who are in remedial courses need to become college ready, but they also need to be presented with opportunities to further develop their leadership skills by participating in clubs or student organizations, who work on campus, or engage in other leadership opportunities. Research has shown that students who participate in student organizations or leadership development programs learn leadership skills such as decision-making, how to work effectively with groups, administrative skills, how to program events, and budgeting skills (Berman, 1978). Barbatis's (2010) study showed that participation in extracurricular activities helped students who were in remedial classes succeed in developing better social and academic skills. Therefore, county colleges should understand student's leadership perceptions so they can help students build a repertoire of skills that four year universities desire. To understand students' perception of leadership, program evaluation is necessary.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to document students' perceptions of their leadership development experiences at county college. Students attending college have many opportunities to gain leadership skills; even if they are unaware they are doing so. This study looked at student's perceptions about their roles as leaders and the nature of leadership. Different opportunities the research examined are leadership experiences gained from participation in clubs and organizations, especially those students who hold leadership positions. The research

looked at students who held jobs on campus in different departments like Student Activities or Admissions. In these departments student workers are representatives of the college at New Student Orientation and give tours of campus to perspective students.

Significance of Study

Students at the county college have different opportunities to grow as leaders. Leadership programs offered to students allow them the opportunity to develop their leadership skills in an educational environment. Torres (2008) believed that when effective leadership skills are gained through leadership development programs, positive learning experiences about leadership are the result (p. 17).

The research allowed the county college leaders to understand students' perceptions of leadership and how they experience leadership opportunities while filling a gap in research on county colleges. Research on county colleges is minimal, specifically when understanding how students develop leadership skills. The research showed what skills students are learning and where they are experiencing leadership opportunities.

Research Questions

The focus of this research was on the students' perceptions of leadership. A purposive sample was identified from a pool of 45 students who participated in the county college's leadership development program creating a sample of nine students. The following questions will be answered through the research:

- What experiences and opportunities at the county college do students perceive have helped them develop leadership skills? How do students characterize these opportunities?

- How do county college students characterize leadership experiences in roles such as participation in student organizations, leadership programs, or employment at the college?

Conceptual Framework

Kouzes and Posner (2012) provided a theoretical framework for this study. The researchers studied “effective” leaders and synthesized those findings into five practices and ten commitments that exceptional leaders apply to their work. The five practices include: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes and Posner, 2012). The five practices developed by Kouzes and Posner focused on the changing of an organization’s culture (Goewey, 2012, p. 9).

This research examined students’ perceptions of their leadership experiences by framing interview questions around the five practices and ten commitments of exceptional leaders to gain a basic understanding of how participation in programs at the college, working at the college, or participation in student clubs or organizations affects their leadership development.

Assumptions

The research assumed that students participating in leadership activities can describe leadership skills they have gained and understand how participation in certain activities has affected them. The second assumption is that students participating in the research will provide an accurate and reliable self-assessment of their skills and where they learned them when being interviewed. The third assumption is that the information gained from interviews will provide the researcher with an accurate portrayal of what skills students feel they have gained.

Limitations

Several limitations exist within this study. The length of time to complete the study is the first limitation. The study took place during the summer and beginning of fall semester when students were not readily available. The second limitation is the researcher had difficulty contacting students who participated in the leadership program because they were not taking summer classes, vacationing, or graduated. This led the researcher to interview students who were available because they work in the office where the researcher was employed, creating a third limitation. The students from the research were not as diverse as the sample of 45 students participating in the leadership development program, will all work within the same department and know each other. The final limitation was the researchers' relationship to the college and students as he works at the college and personally knew the students. There was the potential for the researcher to be biased towards the study creating a conflict of interest.

Definition of Terms

In order to obtain a better understanding of the topic and research, key terms will be defined in this section.

Student Leadership Development and Student Leaders: Leadership development can be defined as the process of teaching students' leadership skills to enhance their leadership capacity through a variety of methods. Another important term is *student leader*. Murray and Schultz (2013) defined student leaders as those who “demonstrate effective time management, show ability to set goals, build positive relationships, use effective conflict resolution skills, show an interest in helping others build their leadership skills, become involved in community action programs, and promote understanding and respect across racial and ethnic groups” (p. 16). Skills such as effective time management, the ability to set goals, build relationships, use conflict

resolution, and show an interest in helping others are all skills that are learned in effective leadership development programs.

Conclusion

County colleges need to offer leadership training and leadership opportunities as it will provide graduates with the necessary skills for effective civic involvement (Jacob, 2006). One can conclude that leadership training should be offered to county college students as they will benefit from receiving training. County College students will grow as students and individuals and gain the skills to become better leaders and have better chances of obtaining jobs and admittance to four years institutions after graduation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Student leadership development is an important aspect of college life. Many institutions provide leadership training to help their students further develop their leadership skills. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of students' perceptions about their leadership development at a County College in New Jersey. Minimal research exists that examines students' perceptions of leadership opportunities offered at county colleges. The major themes in the literature review are: County College Student, Student Leadership, Types of Leadership Opportunities, and studies that used the Student Leadership Practices Inventory.

The research in this literature review was found through the use of several different databases including PsychInfo, ERIC, and EBSCO Host. The research articles years range from 2001 to 2015, are scholarly articles, and are peer reviewed articles. Keywords used in the search included: leadership development, development, county college students, county colleges, universities, leadership, student workers, education, and personal development. Many articles were researched, but only those articles corresponding to the research topic were included in this literature review.

Review of Relevant Literature

In the following section relevant literature to the research will be examined. The first section profiles county college students, examining how research defines students who attend county college. The second section will review literature that explains and defines the term student leadership. Research in this section examines participation in student clubs and organizations seeking to find its effects on students. The third section, Types of Leadership Programs, reviews Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Leadership behaviors by going in depth

explaining each of the five. In the Program Evaluation section relevant research that examines how others have evaluated research programs. The final section explains studies that have used the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) and explains the findings.

County College Students. In order to better understand the topic and research, key terms will be defined in this section. The first term that needs to be defined is the county college student. Drexler and Campbell (2011) investigated self-development behaviors of county college students or two-year college students. They profiled county college students versus four year college students stating that county college students are usually older, come from low-income families, and are less likely to be white and more likely to receive financial aid (Drexler & Campbell, 2011, p. 610). Students who attend county college are more likely to do so because of the low cost and its proximity to their homes (THECB, 2010). They are usually either non-traditional students or first-generation students (Gibson & Slate, 2010). Based on several characteristics described by Kim, Sax, Lee, and Hagedorn (2010), students are considered non-traditional because of age, length between end of high school and start of college, enrollment as part-time students, working full time, being a single parent and having children or dependents. Using the characteristics described above, seventy-five percent of county college students can be identified as non-traditional.

Student Leadership. Another important aspect of this study is student leadership. Murray and Schultz (2013) defined student leaders as ones who “demonstrate effective time management, show ability to set goals, build positive relationships, use effective conflict resolution skills, show an interest in helping others build their leadership skills, become involved in community action programs, and promote understanding and respect across racial and ethnic

groups” (p. 16). Skills described above are all skills that are learned in effective leadership development programs and participation in student clubs or organizations.

Foubert and Grainger (2006) analyzed the effects of college on student development. Students participating in the study completed the Student Development Task and Lifestyle Inventory which measured the “development on three of Chickering and Reisser’s vectors (1993) such as measuring, establishing and clarifying purpose, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and moving through autonomy toward interdependence” (p. 173). At the beginning of both freshman and sophomore years, and at the end of their senior year students completed the SDTLI to see if participation in student clubs and activities helped them develop their psychosocial skills. Sixty percent of the participants were male and forty percent were female. The range of student’s age was 18 to 22. The study found that students who are more involved in clubs and activities had higher scores than students who were uninvolved. Students who held leadership positions in clubs and ran meetings had the highest development scores overall when compared to students who were just involved in clubs and attended meetings. Foubert and Grainger (2006) found “...that involvement in student organizations has a strong association with psychosocial development, particularly on students establishing and clarifying purpose, educational involvement, career planning, life management, and cultural participation” (p. 180).

Foreman and Retallick (2013) examined the relationship between involvement in clubs, activities, and organization and leadership outcomes using a mixed research method. The researchers collected quantitative data by asking students to complete questionnaires about how much time they spent on activities. Qualitative data collected measured how focused students were on the activities they were participating in focusing on involvement in clubs, activities, and

organizations. Using the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS-R2) the researchers measured student's leadership by looking at the value of their scores. They found that the more clubs students served as officers in led to the student having higher leadership scores. Foreman and Retallick (2013) suggested the optimum amount of clubs students should participate in to achieve high leadership scores are three or four.

Types of leadership programs. The Student Leadership Practices Inventory identified leadership behaviors and actions leaders use when that they are at their best (Posner, 2004, p. 444). Behaviors of the leaders are categorized into five topics including: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2009). The first leadership practice is *Model the Way* which recognizes how leaders model the behavior they want their followers to use, thus leading by example. These behaviors are based upon personal beliefs and values of the leader (Gallagher et al., 2014, p. 47). The second leadership practice, *Inspiring a Shared Vision*, examines leaders who inspire a shared vision are forward thinkers allowing them to unite a group through the development of a vision. The third leadership practice is *Challenging the Process*. Leaders who challenge the process are advocates for change, always asking questions and seeking answers. They are willing to take risks to create opportunities. They are innovative and develop opportunities from sources. *Enabling Others to Act*, the fourth leadership practice is an important aspect of transformational leadership. Leaders who are enabling others to act are leaders that can build or strengthen a team. They must be able to share power through delegating tasks. The final leadership practice, *Encourage the Hearts of Others*, explains how leaders must be able to enjoy and applaud others contributions. Leaders must be able to encourage others and celebrate the success of reaching a goal as a team, thus working towards a common vision.

Program Evaluation. Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001) presented important findings about leadership programs at county colleges. Using longitudinal data, Cress et al. (2001) examined 875 students at 10 colleges and found that students who participate in leadership training showed significant growth intellectually and developmentally, specifically in areas such as “civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theories, and personal and societal values” (Cress et al., 2001, p. 15). Parker and Pascarella (2013) examined college student experiences which can lead to the development of leadership skills. The researchers wanted to understand if diversity experiences, like participating in extracurricular activities or co-curricular activities, had an impact on the development of students’ leadership skills. Parker and Pascarella (2013) surveyed students after their freshman year and after their senior year and found that having a such leadership experiences did contribute to the positive development of students into socially responsible leaders.

MacPhee, Dahinten, Hejazi, Laschinger, Kazanjian, McCutcheon, and O'Brien-Pallas (2014) examined a leadership development program offered to nurses. MacPhee et al. (2014) explained the characteristics of the program called the Nursing Leadership Institute (NLI). The Nursing Leadership Institute offered programs in leadership development that would teach participants how to empower staff members through emotional intelligence and obtaining the qualities of a transformational leader. Leaders who are transformational and emotionally intelligent are self-aware and inspire others. The NLI program specifically focuses on empowering leadership behavior which includes: decision making, creating and accomplishing goals, and enhancing the meaning of work. To obtain data from the participants, MacPhee et al. (2014) used a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test method, asking participants to report their

behaviors a year after the program. Using multiple regressions, the researchers found that program participants were using more empowering behavior as leaders. The researchers concluded that through empowerment training, participants can learn the skills needed to empower employees.

Another example of a leadership program offered to nurses was researched by Chappell and Willis (2012). They reviewed the Amy V. Cockcroft Foundation Fellowship (AVC Fellowship). The AVC Fellowship is a leadership development program also offered to nurses at the University of South Carolina. At the AVC Fellowship students learn conflict resolution and negotiation skills, communication skills, and personal development skills. Chappell and Willis (2013) explained the difficulty in having participants respond to surveys, leading them to use the content analysis approach where students answered surveys online. The survey had 42 nurses respond out of one hundred eight participants, or 38.39%. The researchers found four main themes from the survey including: personal development, communication skills, conflict resolution/negotiation skills and career action/change. Nurses who participated in the study found their leadership style changing because they became more self-aware due to the leadership development program.

Similar to the NLI program, MacKie (2014) explained a strength based leadership training program that taught transformational leadership skills to participants. Participants in the study were senior level managers in businesses. They were assigned to coaching groups and attended six sessions where they received feedback on strengths, goals setting, and development of strengths. Participants were coached on how to become better leaders. Using control groups, senior level managers were assigned to coaching groups to measure the impact of the transformational leadership training. Once the group session ended, participants were surveyed

using a Realise2 Strength Inventory and a 49 question MLQ. Participants in the coaching transformational leadership qualities increased after analysis of the surveys.

Different colleges or universities offer leadership programs, each with their own respective model. Murray and Schultz (2013) reviewed The Applied Tailored Leadership Adventure for Success (ATLAS) program offered at the University of Arizona. Murray and Schultz (2013) measured the success of the program by determining if it met the objectives by creating student learning outcomes. After the program ends, students are surveyed. The surveys ask students if they felt they have developed leadership skills because of the program. Students are presented with four responses to answer the questions. In 2010-2011, 45.3% of students responded that their leadership skills had greatly improved, proving the program was successful. Murray and Schultz (2013) also looked at the number of attendees which had increased each year.

Drexler and Campbell (2011) investigated self-development behaviors learned by county college students who studied abroad. The researchers mailed out 200 surveys and only received 46 pretest and posttest surveys back. Surveys included seven vectors of student development created by Chickering et al. (1993). Using a one-way ANOVA to analyze data they found that participants in the study abroad programs self-development behaviors had increased significantly.

Hamilton and Bean (2005) researched using servant-leadership to train leaders within the organization named Synovus Financial Corporation located in the United States. To assess the leadership program in the United Kingdom, Hamilton and Bean (2005) used the qualitative method called phenomenological interviews. Phenomenological interviews are in-depth interviews where the researcher focuses and listens to the interviewee instead of asking a series

of questions. The researcher asks open-ended questions in hope of obtaining in-depth answers. The interviewee is never interrupted during the interview. Through phenomenological interviews, the research found that employees enjoyed learning about the servant-leadership model. Hamilton and Bean (2005) called for changes to be made so individuals could adapt to create a new frame.

Haber (2011) described development of leaders through peer education or mentoring. She explained the importance of peer leadership programs and how they help develop a student and their student mentor. In the early stages of leadership researchers thought leaders were born and their skills were not able to develop. Haber (2011) further found that when adding the peer education component to a leadership program, all participants involved benefit.

Shek (2013) reviewed a mandatory leadership class offered to college students at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In Hong Kong, leaders thought college students were becoming narcissistic and they needed to develop their leadership skills to become model citizens. The course, named Tomorrow's Leaders, taught students to develop self-awareness, acquire interpersonal skills, learn to self-reflect, and recognize the importance of the pursuit of knowledge. Students participated in focus groups after the course and found that students developed leadership skills and perceived the class positively. In focus groups, researchers meet with a group of participants pose questions for the group to respond to. Participants in the focus group can build off others' responses. Researchers use focus groups to gain collective views and see if they can find any similarities between responses.

Okpala, Hopson, Chapman, & Fort (2011) examined school administrators from three schools in North Carolina to see if the graduate school curriculum influenced development of a student. They assessed the impact of job experience on leadership skills, the impact of national

standards, and what attributes a leader possesses. Using mixed-method research, through a Leadership Expertise Survey (LES), the researchers obtained qualitative and quantitative data. Using a two part series the researchers had participants in the study answer four open-ended questions in interviews. During the second section of the LES, Okpala et al. (2011) assessed the cognitive dimensions of the participants' leadership development through a survey. The research found that 95.2% of school administrators identified on the job experience as the way they developed their leadership skills, followed by on the job experience/internships and field experience at 85.2%, college courses at 80.8%, and personal attributes at 55.3%.

Lumby (2005) collected data by interviews, focus groups, and surveying staff members of ten organizations who participated in a leadership development program. The researcher also collected biographical data. Lumby (2005) wanted to find the effect of leadership development programs on organizational performance. During the data collection, the issue of diversity was examined. Through a mixed method research, Lumby (2005) found that relationships exist between leadership, embracing diversity, and leadership development.

Student Leadership Practices Inventory. Organizational leaders use various approaches to measure leadership development. The Student Leadership Practices Inventory is one such measure. The SLPI, developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012), measures five practices of leadership and is aligned with the concepts of transformational leadership. Gallagher et al. (2014) believed "The model of transformational leadership is ideal for educational institutions such as universities since it fits well with the ideals and goals associated with growth and improvement within academic institutions" (p. 47). In the case of this research, a pretest was given to students before the program began to obtain their SLPI score. After students complete the program they were given a posttest by taking the SLPI again to see if their leadership scores

increased. This survey data reflects a short period of time, and is presented as secondary to the main focus of the study.

Torres (2008) researched the effects of a leadership development program on county colleges using the SLPI and surveys. She looked to see if students showed significant growth in leadership behaviors and whether their leadership scores were different based on gender and age. Sixty two participants participated in the study. Students showed growth in the five leadership practices after participation in a leadership development program and felt that participation also helped them grow in other areas as well. No significant differences existed between male and female students and age of students with regards to the five leadership practices.

Mendez-Grant (2001) examined three groups of students at a Texas Woman's University focusing her study on retention rates of students. Using the SLPI Mendez-Grant (2001) gave 151 students a pretest before participation in a university sponsored program aimed to develop students into leaders and a posttest after to see if their leadership scores had increased. The study found that pretest and posttest scores were statistically significant for one group but not statistically significant for the other two. The lack of differences in those two groups signifies that participation in the program did not increase those students' leadership skills.

Mizraji (2012) examined student referees employed in the recreation department at Oklahoma State University. Forty referees participated in the study, twenty new referees and twenty returning referees. Participants of the study took the SLPI before the season started and after the season ended to see if they had developed leadership skills. Mizraji (2012) also wanted to see if the difference between new referees and returning referees SLPI scores were statistically significant. Results of the SLPI showed a positive increase in all five of the leadership behaviors outlined in the SLPI for all referees. There difference between new referees and returning

referees was not statistically significant. The study shows that participating in recreation activities on a college campus can lead to development of leadership behaviors.

Pugh (2000) evaluated the outcomes of the University of Georgia's leadership development program they offer to students. One major focus of Pugh's (2000) study was that limited efforts have been made to investigate the success and impact of leadership programs. The study used qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the success of the program, one of which was the SLPI. The study found that participation in the universities leadership development program led to changes in perceptions of leadership experiences and behaviors measured by the SLPI. The study also showed that age, gender, race, and participation in clubs or Greek organizations were not statistically significant.

Gallagher et al. (2014) examined the leadership differences between students from different colleges at different levels of education (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior) to see if their views on leadership had changed. Gallagher et al. (2014) chose to use the SLPI as the instrument to measure the students' leadership capacity because it is an established tool specifically developed to measure a student's leadership capacity. The study found that as students aged and progressed through college, their leadership experience scores and SLPI scores greatly increased because of participation in college activities.

Conceptual Framework

The research of Kouzes and Posner (2012) provided a theoretical framework for this research. The researchers developed five practices and ten commitments that exceptional leaders apply to their work. The five practices are modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. The five practices developed by Kouzes and Posner focus on the changing of an organizations culture (Kouzes and

Posner, 2012 as cited in Goewey, 2012, p. 9). This research examined the five leadership practices using the student leadership practices inventory (SLPI) to measure students' leadership scores at a county college, thus providing a framework that can be used in the future when assessing leadership programs. By using the five practices developed by Kouzes and Posner, students participating in the program will experience the ways leaders think and act to enhance their leadership skills used in their everyday lives. Many leadership theories exist that could be used as the framework for this study. Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices and ten commitments were used because they best align with and inform the framework the leadership development program uses.

Conclusion

There is a major need for the County College leaders to understand their students' perception of leadership development. Students who attend county colleges need more guidance than students who attend four year universities because most come to college undecided on their major or future. Students who attend county colleges are often at risk students who come from low income areas or nontraditional students who have been in the workforce for many years and are coming back to college to create new opportunities for themselves (Drexler & Campbell, 2011).

Jacob (2006) believes it is the county college's obligation to prepare graduates to deal with societal and economic issues. Therefore, county colleges need to offer leadership training as it will provide graduates with the necessary skills for effective civic involvement. Leadership training also teaches county college students the leadership skills businesses desire. If students have participated in leadership training, businesses or four year institutions may see that as more of an incentive to hire them or admit them to the college. One can conclude that leadership

training should be offered by county college leadership as students and their employers will benefit from it. They will grow as students and individuals and gain the skills to become better leaders and have better chances of obtaining jobs and admittance to four years institutions after graduation.

Minimal research exists on the evaluation of students' perceptions of leadership development experiences at the county college. Evaluating students' perceptions of leadership is necessary to understand if students benefitted from participation in programs, working on campus, or participating in clubs. It is important to understand where students feel they are learning leadership. Students and county college leaders need to understand the importance of leadership training. County colleges can provide leadership training and leaders can be proactive in producing future leaders. With the lack of research on the effectiveness of leadership development program, future research should be conducted on this topic. To guide the research, qualitative research methods were utilized. Through interviewing, data were obtained to address the following questions:

- What experiences and opportunities at the county college do students perceive have helped them develop leadership skills? How do students characterize these opportunities?
- How do county college students characterize leadership experiences in roles such as participation in student organizations, leadership programs, or employment at the college?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The method of study used for this research included analyzing archival data about student leaders' demographic information, school status, employment status, and leadership activities. Archival data was drawn from a population of 45 students who participated in the county colleges' leadership development program. Purposive sampling was used to obtain 9 participants to create a smaller group that was representative of the 45 students who participated in the leadership development program. Students from the leadership development program were sent an email asking for their participation in a study.

The 9 students chosen for the research participated in a focus group interview. Following the focus group interview, one-on-one interviews were conducted in person. Students who participated in this study were 18 and up and each participant signed an informed consent form. The study took place at a county college located in Central New Jersey where the researcher serves as an administrator.

Students participating in the research were both full time and part time students who were enrolled at the county college the Spring 2016 semester. The age of the participants in the study ranged from eighteen and up. Students who participated in the study either worked at the college in various campus departments or participated in or held leadership positions in student clubs or organizations on campus. They also participated in the county college's leadership development program.

To choose participants for this study, purposive sampling was used. Students were contacted by email to asking for their participation in the study. Students who were readily available to participate in the study were asked to participate in the group interview and one-on-one interview. Interview questions focused on students answering questions based on the Five

Leadership Practices and Ten Leadership commitments developed by Kouzes & Posner (2012). Students who participated in the study were asked about where they learned to develop leadership skills outside of the classroom.

Students who participated in the college's leadership development program were asked to complete a demographics form asking them about their race, age, gender, academic level, and participation in activities on campus. The gender of the participants in the leadership development program was 30.3% male and 69.7% female. The race of participants in the leadership development program were 9.1% Puerto Rican and Caucasian, 9.1% Caucasian, 30.3% Hispanic, 9.1% Asian, 18.2% African American, 12.1% Indian, 9.1% Puerto Rican, and 3.0% African American and Puerto Rican. Students were asked what their academic levels were and could have responded from the selections of Freshman, Sophomore, or Other. From the choices 18.8% of the participants were Freshman, 46.9% were Sophomores, and 34.4% chose other. Students were also asked to report their age into one of three ranges: 18-20, 21-23, or 24+. The percentage of students who fell into the 18-20 age range was 51.5%, while 21.2% were in the 21-23 age range, and 27.3% were in the 24+ age range. Students were also asked about their participation in activities on campus. From the responses on the demographics sheet, 48.5% of the students worked on campus, 51.5% of students participated in student clubs, and 27.3% of students held leadership positions in clubs.

As previously stated, Kouzes and Posner (2012) provided a theoretical framework for this study including five practices and ten commitments that exceptional leaders apply to their work. The five practices are modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6). Aligned with each leadership practice are two commitments of leadership. This research examined the five

leadership practices using a qualitative research method to gain a better understanding of student's perceptions of leadership, providing a framework that can be used in the future when assessing leadership programs or students leadership experiences.

Setting

The study took place at a county college located in Central New Jersey where the researcher served as an administrator in the Office of Student Activities. The college has an overall enrollment of 12,064 students that includes a very diverse population (Middlesex County College, n.d.). The college's Office of Student Activities provides students with many opportunities to develop leadership skills. For instance, students can participate in clubs or organizations where they can hold leadership positions such as President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. They also have the opportunity to participate in service learning organizations where they can volunteer through various county organizations. Another opportunity the college offers students is to work on campus in various departments where they represent the college at New Student Orientation, give tours to perspective students, interact with faculty and staff members, and learn organizational culture. Students who work on campus have the opportunity to learn leadership skills from employees of the department they work in. Students can also participate in a leadership development program the college offers.

During the 2016 spring semester college leaders offered students the opportunity to participate in a leadership development program which began in March 2016 and ended in May 2016. Forty-five students are admitted by a committee made up of several college administrators from departments including Student Activities, Admissions, Counseling and Career Services, and Democracy House (Service Learning Organization on campus). Participants of the program

were students from service learning student organizations, members of student clubs, student employees of the college, or students who were interested in developing their leadership skills.

Data in this research was obtained by documenting archival data of student leaders' demographic information, school status, employment status, and leadership activities by reviewing student's demographics sheets they completed during the colleges leadership development program. Additional data was drawn from interviewing students who were representatives of the forty five students from the leadership program. Nine to 12 students who completed the program were chosen to participate in a focus group where they answered questions about other opportunities they have had to develop leadership skills at the college. These opportunities can be but are not limited to participation in student clubs or organizations, opportunities to work on campus, opportunities to attend lectures, or other events the college offers.

Participants

Participants in this research study were students at a county college located in New Jersey. Students participating in the research were both full time and part time students who were enrolled at the county college the Spring 2016 semester. The age of the participants in the study ranged from 19 to 27. Students participating have either worked at the college in various on campus departments or have participated in or held leadership positions in student clubs or organizations on campus.

Sample

Participants in the research were students involved in clubs, student organizations, or student workers. Students who participated in the study had diverse backgrounds with regard to age, gender, race, professional experience, leadership experience, and educational experiences.

Fifty-one percent of the students attend the county college full time while 49% attend the college part time. The average age of a typical student at the county college is 23.2 years old. The ethnicity of students at the county college includes the following percentages: 32% White (Non-Hispanic), 29% Hispanic, 13% Asian, 11% Black, 3% two or more races, 9% unreported, and 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Middlesex County College, n.d.).

Students who participated in the study were all participants in the college's leadership development program. Students' ages ranged from 19 to 27 with an average age of 21. Five participants were females and 4 were males. One student was Puerto Rican and White, one was Asian, one was Puerto Rican, Two were African American, one was Caucasian, one was African American and Puerto Rican, one was Indian, and one was Hispanic. Four students were in their second year at the county college, four students attended the county college for more than two years, and one student was in their first year. All participants were student workers, with eight students working in the Student Activities Office and one working at the bookstore. Seven students participated in clubs. Of the seven, 4 students held leadership positions which could have included President, Vice President, Secretary, or Treasurer. One student participated in a service learning organization. Seven students attended classes full time (took more than 12 credits a semester) while 2 attended classes part time (11 credits or less a semester). As one can see the sample size was very diverse.

Data

Data collection for this research focused on gathering information from students to document where they learned leadership skills and the leadership skills they learned. The data was collected from nine students who participated in the county college's leadership development program from a focus group interview and one-on-one interviews. The data

process involved three steps. Students that participated in the college's leadership development programs demographic information was reviewed to draw a sample of 9 students to participate in the focus group and one-on-one interviews. This sample of 9 students was a representation of the 45 students who participated in the study and will be done by purposive sampling. If necessary, convenience sampling would have been used if purposive sampling did not work. The second and third steps included two types of interviews. The data collection instrument that was used throughout this research is first a focus group interview and then one-on-one interviews. The study itself was approved by the college's Institutional Review Board (IRB) allowing the researcher to use the college's students within the study. Students were asked to complete an *informed consent form* allowing the researcher to use their data in the study.

Purposive Sampling. Purposive sampling was used to obtain participants in the study. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to match the sample of 9 students to the demographics of the participants of the college's leadership development program. "The goal of purposive sampling is not to randomly select units from a population to create a sample with the intention of making generalisations (i.e., statistical inferences) from that sample to the population of interest" (Laerd Dissertation, 2012, para. 3). Instead the goal of purposive sampling is "...to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable you to answer your research questions" (Laerd Dissertation, 2012, para. 4).

Convenience Sampling. If needed, a follow up effort using a convenience sample would have occurred. "A convenience sample is simply one where the units that are selected for inclusion in the sample are the easiest to access" (Laerd Dissertation, 2012, para. 3). This method of sampling would have been used to obtain participants who were more easily accessible. The students the researcher knows could be interviewed were the first ones that

would have been selected. As it is recommended that the moderator is familiar with participants (Merriam, 2009), participants of the focus group were students the researcher knows from working with the student's office or with clubs.

Focus Group Interviews. The first interview was a focus group interview where students were interviewed in a group setting. Creswell (2012) stated "focus groups can be used to collect shared understanding from several individuals" (p. 218). Focus group interviews allow the researcher to collect data through an interview with a group of people. Interviewing individuals in a group setting can be advantageous to the researcher because it allows members of the group to hear what others have to say. This can help participants think of answers and build off of each other's answers, creating better answers and allowing the researcher to obtain the best information. Patton (2002) explained, "Unlike a series of one-on-one interviews, in a focus group participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say" (p. 386).

One-on-One Interviews. Students that participated in the focus group interview also participated in a one-on-one interview. During one-on-one interview students answered questions about the types of skills they learned while participating in activities at the county college. One-on-one interviews allowed the students to feel more comfortable which led to them providing the researcher with more data than in the focus group interview.

Analysis

The transcript analysis done in this study was on the focus group interview and one-on-one interviews. Interview questions that were asked during the focus group can be found in Appendix E. The following section details how data from the interviews were analyzed.

Transcription. Once the interviews were concluded, audio files were sent to a professional transcriber. “Transcription is the process of converting audiotape recording or field notes into text data” (Creswell, 2012, p. 239). Transcribing the interview allowed the researcher to code the data.

Coding. The focus group interview was printed and hand-coded first with the researcher looking for similarities between the participants’ answers to twelve questions about the leadership skills they learned while participating in activities at the county college. After the focus group interview was coded the researcher then coded the one-on-one interviews developing more codes by looking for similarities between students answers to the five questions they answered. Codes were stored in an excel spreadsheet and the next step of the process was to reduce the number of codes by placing them into five to seven major themes by eliminating redundant codes (Creswell, 2012, p. 248). Once major themes were identified, sub-topics were developed to match each theme. A diagram was developed showing each theme and its respective subtopic and will be explained in Chapter 4.

Participant Rights

Students participating in the study completed an informed consent form explaining their rights. Participants had the right at any time to not be included in the study or not participate in the study from the beginning and they could have dropped out anytime. Before becoming involved students participating were debriefed on the volume and magnitude of the study letting them know that no risk is involved. Participants of the study were also told the length of the study and what they would be doing. Students participating in the study remained anonymous throughout its entirety.

Potential Limitations

There were four potential limitations that existed in the study, 1) Sample Size, 2) Conflicts with Participants Schedules, 3) Relationship of the researcher with the participants, and 4) Time of study taking place. Each potential limitation is described in depth within this section.

Sample Size. The research projected to have 12 to 16 students participating in the study that participated in the college's leadership development program. The projected sample was designed to represent of the ethnicity, gender, and age of the 45 students who participated in the college's leadership development program. The researcher emailed all 45 participants of the leadership development program asking for their participation in the study. Out of the 45 students emailed only 11 students replied to the email. Of the 11 students who replied only 9 students were able to participate in the focus group interview and the one-on-one interviews.

Conflicts with Participants Schedule. The second limitation of this study was the belief that all students who participated in the research would stay through its entirety. Students have schedules that may conflict with the times that interviews take place. This may have caused students to drop out of the study.

Relationship of the Researcher with the Participants. The third limitation was the researchers' relationship to the program and students who participate in the program as he serves on the committee developing the program and may supervise students who will participate in the study. There was the potential for the researcher to be bias towards the student's responses, thus creating a conflict of interest.

Time of Study Taking Place. The final limitation was that study took place during the summer semester when students were not available. The researcher had difficulty contacting

students who participated in the leadership program as they were not be available during the summer semester.

Conclusion

This research interviewed 9 students from the county college who participated in the leadership development program to obtain data to learn where and what skills students learned. Each participant of the program participated in or held a leadership position in a student club or worked on campus. Using a focus group, students were asked various questions about their leadership opportunities and the leadership skills they have learned that the college has presented them with. After students participated in the focus group interview, they participated in one-on-one interviews. Once interviews were completed, the student's interviews were transcribed and coded to develop major themes. Major themes had subtopics attached to them and are diagrammed and explained in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to document students' perceptions of their leadership development experiences at a County College, one of the 19 county colleges in New Jersey. The study was conducted at a county college located in Central New Jersey that enrolls over 12,000 students. One member the leadership team at the college sought information on what students' perceptions of leadership development opportunities were and how they experience leadership opportunities. The following two questions have guided this study:

- What experiences and opportunities at the county college do students perceive have helped them develop leadership skills? How do students characterize these opportunities?
- How do county college students characterize leadership experiences in roles such as participation in student organizations, leadership programs, or employment at the college?

Responses to the guiding questions were sought through one-on-one interviews with a representative sample of students enrolled in a leadership program. Both the focus group interview and one-on-one interviews of nine students took place over a period of one month. The information collected from the interviews was then transcribed and evaluated for themes. Themes emerged from responses to the guiding questions and to find specific connections between the students' leadership experiences and the skills they learned from participating in leadership activities. Chapter Five will discuss the implications of the data, recommendations, and next steps researchers should take in the future.

Analysis Methodology

The Analysis Methodology section will describe how data was collected and analyzed. It will review what artifacts were used to complete the study, look at how data was collected, review the collection methods, show the interview questions, describe how data was coded, and identify themes found through the coding process.

Artifacts used for the study. Data was developed from two sources. The focus group interview and the one-on-one interviews with the nine students provided the researcher with a substantial amount of data in the form of transcripts. The interviews provided the research with a view of leadership through a students' point of view.

Data collection. Data collection for this research focused on gathering information from students to document where they learned leadership skills and the leadership skills they learned. The data was collected from nine students who participated in the county college's leadership development program from a focus group interview and one-on-one interviews.

Collection methods. Data was collected over a one month period through a focus group interview of nine students who also participated in one-on-one interviews. Data collection occurred in October of 2016. The first interview to take place was the focus group interview of nine students and took place in the early part of October of 2016. This interview occurred on the county college campus after working hours. Participants of the focus group interview were a representative sample of 33 students who participated in the county college's leadership development program, participated in student clubs, and worked on campus.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the nine students throughout the month of October in 2016 and took place at the county college campus after working hours. Participants of the one-on-one interviews also participated in the focus group interview that

occurred earlier in the month. Questions for both the focus group interview and the one-on-one interviews were developed from the conceptual framework developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012) and were:

- Has participating in activities helped you define your values as a leader? If so, what way? What happened? What are some things you learned?
- Have you ever been able to model the way as a leader by using your personal values? How so? What happened and what did you learn?
- Have you set examples as leaders? In what ways have your actions aligned with your values?
- Has participation in any activities helped you define your future or create a vision of what you want to become or what you want to accomplish?
- Have you ever created a vision for a group and moved forward with it? How did you do so?
- Have there been any experiences where you have taken risks to change something or improve it? What did you do? What did you learn from this? Did it work?
- Have there been any small things you have done that you believe have added up to large victories when trying to change something? What worked and what didn't work?
- What activities did you participate in that helped you model the way or learn these type of leadership skills? Were you in a group?
- Have there been any opportunities where you have built trust in a group and collaborated on something that was successful, whether it was planning an event or doing something at work?

- In what leadership opportunities were you presented with to do this?
- When working towards a team goal, how do you support members to realize their contributions?
- How did you show appreciation to your constituents? Did this create a sense of community or a sense of accomplishment for your constituents? What was your evidence?
- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you model the way or learned to model the way? How did this happen?
- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you inspire others and inspire a vision? How did this happen?
- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you challenge the normal to make a significant change? How did this happen?
- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you learn how to enable others to act? How did this happen?
- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you learn to encourage others? How did this happen?

The focus group interview lasted approximately sixty minutes while the one-on-one interviews lasted between seven to fifteen minutes. All interviews were recorded on a Samsung Galaxy S7 cell phone using the Voice Recorder application. Interviews were sent to a professional transcriber for transcription. Once the transcription was done, the researcher conducted a member check by sending the transcribed interviews to all participants for corrections or clarification. Participants of the research study examined their individual transcripts and no revisions were suggested. All documents were saved in a locked folder on the

computer of the researcher in two folders, one holding the focus group interview and the other holding the one-on-one interviews.

Data coding. All interviews were saved and stored as Word documents. The focus group interview was printed and hand-coded first with the researcher looking for similarities between the participants answer to twelve questions about the leadership skills they learned while participating in activities at the county college.

The focus group interview was assessed by using multiple coding methods and all codes were entered into an Excel document. The first coding process led to the development of 54 separate field identifications. Through Excel, the 54 fields were assessed by placing them in alphabetical order to combine similar codes into a single code for simplification. Pattern coding was used to identify concepts from the transcript of the focus group interview. The second round of coding also took place through Excel. The researcher developed one word codes to represent the 54 fields where similarities existed. Second-level coding identified 15 codes. Third-level coding took place to further identify key concepts and themes. The researcher used pattern coding through Excel to identify similarities between the 15 codes found in the second-level coding process. The third-level coding process identified 4 themes.

Identified Themes. The development of codes from analyzing interview transcripts identified four main themes. The four main themes were put into an Excel spreadsheet where the researcher then identified similarities between the four main themes and the codes developed during the first-level analysis. Codes identified in the first-level of coding were matched to the four main themes. The four main themes were *Communication*, *Confidence*, *Encouragement*, and *Teamwork*. The order of the themes is insignificant and is in the order that they were first presented during the coding process.

Results

The results of the study allowed the researcher to identify four main themes. The figure below explains the four main themes as leadership skills students learned from participation in activities at the county college. The four main themes appear as communication, confidence, encouragement, and teamwork. Within each main theme are sub-topics that are skills that fall within that main theme and were coded within that theme. Each major theme demonstrates a relationship to its sub-themes. Figure 1 below shows the four main themes students learned while participating in activities at the county college along with their sub-themes.

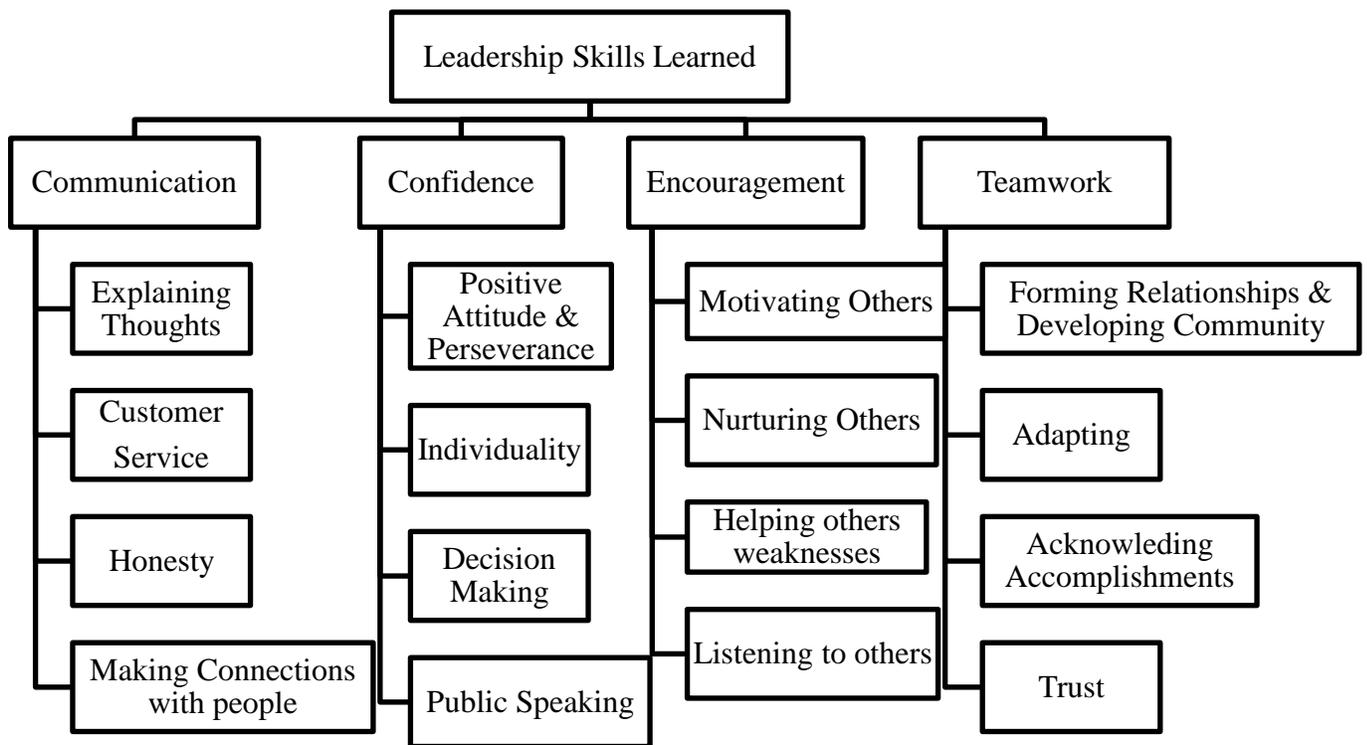


Figure 1. Leadership Skills Learned

Theme One: Communication. This theme was the first one identified during the coding process. During interviews students identified many instances where they learned how to communicate and explained the importance of communication. During the focus group interview students identified leadership skills they learned while participating in activities at the county college. One student described communication to be important during an activity they participated in at the college's leadership development program. Students were put into groups and had to guide one student that was blindfolded through a maze of cups. The student stated "You have other people on the team who are shouting out directions to them as well, so you have to have good communication with your team, designate a person, which would be the leader to really be like, Make this step...Half a step...Full step...So that was an opportunity that was really great as far as building team and trust as well" (Student B). The coding process found four subtopics that coincide with the first theme, Communication. The subtopics that emerged for Communication were Explaining Thoughts, Customer Service, Honesty, and Making Connections with People.

Explaining Thoughts. This subtopic was discussed by three students during the focus group interview. Students understood and learned the importance of how to effectively communicate and explain their thoughts. One student who became president of a club that grew to be one of the most popular clubs on campus spoke about how explaining his thoughts to others helped him grow as a leader. He stated "What worked for me is the ability to simply share my thoughts, ideas, and research and that's what ultimately is making the club a success" (Student B). By participating in activities at the college such as participating in clubs, working at an information desk in the registration area, giving tours to students, and working at new student

orientation, students felt that these opportunities allowed them to learn how to explain their thoughts to help students register for classes or understand college policies.

Customer Service. Students understood the importance of treating people with kindness and respect, which are all aspects of customer service. Students attending new student orientation or students seeking information walking into an office were all noted as customers. During the focus group interview a student was talking working in the Student Activities office and was explaining how important everyone's role is regardless of their position. The student stated "So as small as your job or piece of our team or small of a job that you do...it's all reflected on the bigger thing, the institution or the company itself, so everybody's role is important because we all have somebody to satisfy or anything like that" (Student E). The students understood whom they had to satisfy and what they had to do to accomplish their goal of making the event or task they were completing perfect.

Honesty. During the focus group interview students discussed how honesty was important. Moreover, being honest with incoming students they were talking to at new student orientation. One student noted that students who were in developmental classes were not happy because they felt they would be behind before their college career began. She told the student to view their classes one at a time and not to think too far in advance. She stated,

That helped me teach them that one step at a time is how you take it and that also help me learn to be honest and it also helped me become a good leader as in I could relate to the person. I could teach them honestly that it's okay. Don't be shy or don't be scared of the world. We're going to do this together. (Student F).

Honesty was also noted to be important when dealing with coworkers. Students felt that if they were honest with one another than their relationships would grow and they would enjoy the workplace more.

Making connections with people. An important aspect of communication is being able to make connections with people. During the focus group interview students noted that making connections can be networking or connecting with people by making them feel comfortable, similar to what the student did at new student orientation by being honest as stated above. More so, students understood how important it was to connect with people to keep them engaged in a club or in an activity. Many of the students who participated in the focus group interview participated in clubs. One student learned to make connections with students because she was president of a club. She noticed some club members stopped attending meetings and going to events so the student had to reach out to keep them connected and engaged. To do so the student made sure they always talked to members of the club and understood what they were going through. She made sure to keep other students up to date with all events that were going on. Eventually club members started coming to meetings and events and the club became popular again all because the student was able to keep and make new connections.

Theme Two: Confidence. The second theme identified during the coding process was confidence. This theme emerged from students discussing how they were able to become more positive while talking to students at new student orientation. Students discussed how speaking in front of a crowd also helped build their confidence. Building confidence was one of the most important skills students learned while participating in activities at the college. Throughout the focus group interview students discussed how participation in clubs also helped them become more comfortable with themselves. One student noted that participation in the colleges

leadership development program helped him learn to be more confident. Another student believed working on campus helped them learn to be unique as a leader. The student stated,

But it's just being yourself and that you as an individual, are unique and that feeds into your being a unique leader and having your own style and your own way to doing things and with that has you have your specific group and then making sure they end up being their own leaders one day if that's the case, if that's where their path in life takes them. So I think that's important as well, just individuality. (Student G)

The coding process created four subtopics. The subtopics that emerged during the coding process were Positive Attitude and Perseverance, Individuality, Decision Making, and Public Speaking.

Positive Attitude and Perseverance. An important aspect of having confidence is keeping a positive attitude and being able to persevere during difficult times. Students discussed maintaining a positive attitude and having a growth mindset when things go wrong. One student, who is president of a club, discussed how he maintained a positive attitude after tragedy struck them. Out of the tragedy he was able to maintain a positive attitude and persevere by developing an application for a cell phone that would raise money for a foundation by having people walk. For each mile a person walked or ran a certain amount of money is donated to the foundation of their choice. The student stated, “It helped me with team building, building confidence, and having a growth mindset. I was able to learn after whatever project I finish. It made me learn to adapt whether I did it wrong or right and make it better” (Student A). The same student also wanted to hold a walk on the college campus for the foundation he was raising money for through the application. The first year they had the walk there was not the turnout they had expected. To ensure the walk would be a success in its second year the student maintained a

positive attitude and began to become known on social media by tagging the county college in posts. The county college leadership caught on and helped the student promote his event. The student believes that there will be a large number of attendees at the walk from all over the state of New Jersey and the student contributed this to having a positive attitude and being able to persevere.

Individuality. During the focus group interview two students discussed individuality and having the ability to be comfortable in their own skin. One student gained the confidence to be comfortable in their own skin by participating in a club and by eventually becoming the president of the club. The student was a self-proclaimed “nerd” in high school and was not able to show that side of himself. When the student attended the county college he found comfort in the Anime and Game tech club. The student was accepted by his peers and finally became comfortable in his own skin. With a newfound confidence the student was elected president of the club and was able to make the club one of the most popular on campus by allowing people to feel comfortable in their own skin, just as others had helped the student do. The student stated:

I got more comfortable in my skin and it allowed people around me to be more comfortable with themselves as well and it just teaches everyone that it's okay to have different likes and dislikes and be able to express yourself in the way that you weren't able to before. If people judge you, that's fine because you are all part of a group that's going to support you, your beliefs, and everything that you believe in and I feel like that's the point of coming to a diverse college and that's your role as leader to show people that it's okay to be different and you shouldn't be ashamed of your beliefs or what you like.

(Student F)

The student truly felt that helping others become comfortable with themselves is something that leaders do.

Decision Making. One important part of being a leader is making the correct decisions and having confidence in that decision. Two students stated that leaders make the right decisions, some decisions that benefit themselves or the entire group. One student spoke about how in order for them to be successful as a student and a person they have to surround themselves with other successful people. The opportunity this student had to do this at the college was working on campus in the Student Activities Office. Before accepting employment within the office the student took a few semesters off from college and was not focused. She knew the only way she would be able to succeed as a student was to surround herself with other students who were motivated. The student made the decision to apply to work in the office and it has helped them succeed academically. Leaders make decisions that will help them be successful just as this student has.

Public Speaking. Out of nine students who participated in the focus group interview, six attributed public speaking to them becoming more confident. Not only did they become more confident in their ability to speak in front of large groups, they became more confident in their ability to talk to people and deliver information coherently. Students attributed their development of confidence from public speaking while working new student orientation sessions where they would speak in front of groups of forty or more students. Part of the student's job was to tell a story about attending the county college and how it helped them become successful. At the beginning many students had trouble doing so because they lacked confidence. After speaking in front of a large group of incoming students they began to build confidence. One student stated, "After speaking at orientation and speaking in front of kids, I felt more of a

confidence to be able to do that and it challenged me and also speaking to SSD students has challenged me as a leader because I have to show them encouragement” (Student F). Speaking at new student orientation allowed this student to be confident in their abilities as all leaders should be.

Theme Three: Encouragement. The third theme that emerged during the coding process was encouragement. This topic was developed from students discussing how to motivate individuals and not put people down when they make mistakes. Students learned to encourage others by working with one another in an office and at new student orientation. This topic emerged during the focus group interview. From coding the focus group interview and one on one interview four subtopics under encouragement emerged. Those subtopics include Motivating Others, Nurturing Others, Helping Others Overcome Weaknesses, and Listening to Others.

Motivating Others. This subtopic emerged from students discussing how leaders should act. Two students discussed that leaders should be able to have their followers live up to their full potential. A student stated, “I think a big part of a leader is not only having your team live up to its full potential but also have those people who might not think they have that potential or tap into their uniqueness and strive to achieve better” (Student C). Students learned how to motivate others while working new student orientation. Incoming students would come to orientation and would not want to be there. The student who was working the orientation had to motivate them to want to be at orientation and had to explain to them why they were in certain classes. Some incoming students are directed to take developmental courses and are not happy when they learn that. It is this student’s job to motivate them and explain how the courses work. The student has to teach the student live up to their potential.

Nurturing Others. Students learned that leaders nurture their constituents. Working in an office setting with other students helped them learn how to nurture others. Students understood that when working in an office there is one common goal that everyone is trying to accomplish. Some students working in the office were not grasping how the office worked as quickly as others. A student explained it by saying, “we all wanted to learn the ins and outs of what was supposed to be doing to working in student activities. No matter how hard or how difficult things seem, you wouldn't put any of the workers down even though they messed up that one time. You would encourage them to keep going on and moving forward with it” (Student H). The students learned to nurture others by helping them move forward when things go wrong. They understand how important it is to nurture others in order for an office, department, or institution to be successful.

Helping Others Overcome Weaknesses. Similar to the subtopic, Nurturing Others, students felt that they should help others overcome their weaknesses. Students discussed helping others with weaknesses in the focus group interview. They felt that even if some people were weak in one area they should still be able to work on that skill. Two students discussed giving a tour of campus to second graders. They told the story of how one of them was more comfortable giving the tour than the other. The student who was comfortable reassured the student who was not comfortable that they would be good at giving the tour. The student explained, “It helped me build their confidence. It helped me reassure them. It helped me also get to know them and help them progress as a person as well as me because all the doubts my co-worker had. And then we basically help one another out and that helped us grow” (Student G). The two students understood how they helped one another grow by helping each other realize ones weaknesses.

Listening to Others. This subtopic emerged from a student who was president of a club. The student discussed how as a leader you have to be able to listen to others because their input is very important. An example the student gave was when the club they were president of was planning an event. The student stated that each person in the club had a responsibility, whether it was promoting the event or doing something else, their input was still necessary in order for the event to be a success. The student stated, “Everyone has a different job whether it be to spread the word or to actually figure where we want the location. Everyone would give their input on the event that we were trying to plan. So I would say yeah, it definitely was a community type of thing” (Student D). Understanding others input is an essential skill leaders must have. This student understood that and it helped them build a sense of community for their club.

Theme Four: Teamwork. The fourth and final theme that emerged through the coding process was Teamwork. Students discussed how they enjoy working as a team in the Student Activities Office. They discussed how they first began working together and they did not know one another but by the end of the semester after working together they formed a relationship and a sense of community. One student stated, “I think it's important when you have that type of group atmosphere and that sense of community through friendship. Through friendship is how we built that strong sense of community” (Student H). Part of their success was because they were able to adapt as any leader should be able to do and form trust between one another. Four subtopics emerged from the fourth theme Teamwork which include Forming Relationships and Developing Community, Adapting, Acknowledging Accomplishments, and Trust.

Forming Relationships and Developing Community. Students discussed how they were able to form relationships with one another and develop a sense of community. This subtopic

emerged from student discussing working in the Student Activities office and seeing each other every day. One student discussed how the group of students became so close. He stated,

If you care about the people that you go to work, that you are going to go see at work, then you're more inclined to be happy at work and that's going to improve your overall productivity and also when you guys do things together, activities together, we know that we have that strength and that trust and they got your back when you're doing this type of activities and group engagements stuff” (Student H).

The student felt that caring about his coworkers led to them becoming friends. Friendship led to an overall improved atmosphere that each student worker enjoyed making them productive. The students build friendship by doing activities together outside of work. Those relationships formed outside of the office were brought into the office which made the group of student workers a community.

Adapting. Two students discussed this subtopic. They told a story about how they were unfamiliar with the college’s policies so they thought it would be difficult working new student orientation where they would have to discuss college policies with students. They were also very afraid to speak in front of students. They relied heavily on veteran student workers to help them adapt and learn the information. Both students adapted and learned the policies and became very successful working orientation and giving tours to incoming students. They learned, “Every time you do something with your partners, you have to be willing to communicate. You have to be willing to sometimes take charge whether they're doing it right or wrong and see how everything comes about and at the end of the day, the rewards going to be awesome” (Student A). The two students understood that they had to take charge and communicate with others which led to them being able to adapt.

Acknowledging Accomplishments. This subtopic emerged from one student discussing how an administrator in the Student Activities office helped him plan an event for his club. The administrator helped the student find a location and fund the event. The student's event was very successful and the student was very thankful for all the help and guidance the administrator provided. To show appreciation the student provided the administrator with an MVP trophy. The student stated, "I felt like it was necessary to give him the MVP status. The event itself just created a sense for the community because it showed everyone what he was about, what he wanted ultimately to do for me" (Student I). This student understood how important it is to acknowledge accomplishments, especially for the people who have helped them become successful. It is imperative for a leader to acknowledge accomplishments and reward the people who have helped them accomplish success like this student did.

Trust. Students who worked together discussed opportunities where they learned to trust one another during the focus group interview. One student discussed how they stayed after work with their coworker one day to finish a flyer that they worked on together. During the process of creating the flyer the two students bounced ideas off one another. Both students wanted to complete the flyer so they put in extra time. This helped them learn to trust one another which helped develop their relationship. Another student discussed an opportunity that all student workers were able to participate in where they learned to trust one another. During Spring Break when other students were going on vacation all the student workers from the Student Activities office stayed around and participated in a week-long training. During the training the students participated in ice-breaker activities and learned more information about one another. The student stated, "During spring break, that's where a lot of our trust came in with each other. Even though we did trust each other beforehand, before that week of training, we definitely trust each

other more, a lot of more during that period of time” (Student A). Participating in activities where they learned to trust one another was very valuable. It helped the students develop a very close relationship which made them successful.

Conclusion

Students attending a county college are provided with many opportunities to participate in activities where they can learn leadership skills. This chapter documented the skills the students learned and discussed the opportunities where they learned those skills. Four themes incorporated sixteen subtopics that categorized the skills students learned by participating in activities at the county college. The four themes included Communication, Confidence, Encouragement, and Teamwork. Each of the four themes and their four subtopics were explored through the lens of the students by providing information the researcher learned by coding a focus group interview of nine students and one on one interview of nine students. Chapter 5 will include discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to document students' perceptions of their leadership development experiences at County College, one of the 19 county colleges in New Jersey. The study was conducted at a county college located in Central New Jersey that enrolls over 12,000 students. The data of how and what leadership skills are gained were reviewed through the perspectives of students who attended the county college. The findings and recommendations provided a better understanding of the skills students gain at a county college by participating in non-academic activities. The findings also provided direction about what steps should be taken in the future to obtain more data. The following two questions have guided this study:

- What experiences and opportunities at the county college do students perceive have helped them develop leadership skills? How do students characterize these opportunities?
- How do county college students characterize leadership experiences in roles such as participation in student organizations, leadership programs, or employment at the college?

Findings

The study examined the leadership experiences of students who attended a county college, specifically seeking to find out where they experience leadership and what leadership skills they learned. Throughout the duration of the coding process several themes emerged, with each theme having several subtopics. The themes that emerged from coding the transcripts reflect leadership behaviors students learned by participating in activities at the county college. The findings are described in the following themes of 1) Communication, 2) Confidence, 3) Encouragement, and 4) Teamwork. The findings are leadership skills students learned while

participating in the county college's leadership development program, working on campus, or participating in student clubs and organizations. Each leadership theme and their subtopics align with Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Leadership Practices and Leadership Commitments. Each theme is described below.

Communication. During interviews students identified many instances where they learned how to communicate and explained the importance of how communication helped them become successful in their jobs or student organization. One student described the importance of communication during an activity they participated in at the college's leadership development program. The example was from a time students were put into groups and had to guide one student who was blindfolded through a maze of cups. Students also understood and learned the importance of how to effectively communicate and explain their thoughts. One student who became president of a club which grew to be one of the most popular clubs on campus spoke about how explaining his thoughts to others helped him grow as a leader. He stated "What worked for me was the ability to simply share my thoughts, ideas, and research and that's what ultimately is making the club a success" (Student B). The student felt that sharing his thoughts openly would allow for better means of communication which led to his club becoming a success.

Customer service was another skill students learned. Students understood the importance of treating people with kindness and respect. During the focus group interview a student discussed their experiences while working in the Student Activities office and was explaining how important everyone's role is regardless of their position because all customers must be treated with respect and all questions the customer have should be answered. Students identified honesty as an important part of communication. They experienced learning to be honest while

talking to students at new student orientation. During the focus group interview one student noted that being honest with incoming students was very important. The final part of communication students identified during the focus group interview was connecting with people by making them feel comfortable. One student learned to make her constituents feel comfortable as president of a club. Of the nine students that participated in the focus group interview, four stated that they learned to be honest with incoming students and one another.

The conceptual framework in which this study was designed was Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Leadership Practices and Commitments. Communication was one theme that emerged from the coding process and has four subtopics. The leadership practices and commitments which best describe what students learned were Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Enabling Others to Act. The first leadership commitment described from Modeling the Way was "Find your voice by clarifying your personal values" (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6). This leadership commitment can be best described by the subtopic of Explaining Thoughts. In the research students discussed the importance of explaining their thoughts through participation in a club which helped them find their voice and clarify their personal values. Two leadership practices and commitment align with the research theme of Communication, those being Inspire a Shared Vision and Enable Others to Act. Students learned to be honest with incoming students working new student orientation and learned to enable them to act. This best aligns with Kouzes and Posner's (2012) commitment of "Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations" and "Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion" (p. 6). At new student orientation student workers shared their vision of how to be a successful student by being honest and motivational with incoming freshman.

Confidence. Building confidence was one of the most important skills students learned while participating in activities at the college. Throughout the focus group interview, students identified participation in clubs as a reason they became more comfortable with themselves which helped them gain confidence. One student discussed how having a positive attitude and being able to persevere was another important aspect of confidence. He discussed how tragedy struck him, but with a positive attitude and the ability to persevere, he was able to turn his negative situation into a positive by developing an application for a cell phone that raises money for a foundation that was dear to him. His positive attitude and confidence also helped him hold a statewide walk on the college's campus to raise money for the foundation as well. The student attributed his boost of confidence and ability to persevere because of his participation in a club on campus.

Another student discussed how participation in a club allowed him to learn to be comfortable in his own skin. The student described himself as a “nerd” in high school but they were unable to be open about it. When he attended the county college he joined a student club which allowed him to show that side. The student was voted president of the club and helped others become comfortable with themselves, just as his peers had helped him do. Another student discussed individuality and stated “It's just being yourself and that you as an individual, are unique and that feeds into your being a unique leader and having your own style and your own way to doing things and with that has you have your specific group and then making sure they end up being their own leaders one day” (Student G). This student believed that it was important to acknowledge individuality because it helps others become leaders.

Two students noted decision making as an important part of being confident. They believed that leaders make the right decisions, some decisions that benefit themselves or the

entire group. One student spoke about how, in order for them to be successful as a student and a person, he had to surround himself with other successful people so he obtained a job in an office on campus.

Out of nine students who participated in the focus group interview, six attributed public speaking to them building confidence. Speaking at new student orientation as an employee in front of forty or more incoming students helped them become more comfortable with their abilities. One student stated “You have to be comfortable talking to people. You're speaking in front of 50+ students and a lot of them never even attended on coming here (to college) and some of them didn't even know what they want to do. It's nerve-wracking. I've been in that position before so you have to be comfortable speaking to them” (Student E). Students were able to build confidence in their abilities by speaking in front of large groups of students. Students felt they could use the confidence found from public speaking in their future endeavors as leaders.

One leadership practice, Model the Way, and two commitments from Kouzes and Posner (2012) align best with the theme of Confidence found by the research. The first leadership commitment of “Find your voice by clarifying your personal values” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6) describes two students who discussed the subtopic of Individuality. Students learned to find their voice by participating in a club. Through participation in the club the students were able to clarify and define their personal values and share that with others. The second leadership commitment of “Set the example by aligning actions with shared values” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6) describes a student who discussed the subtopic of Decision Making. This student described how he wanted his actions and values to align with others in order for him to become a better student. The student made the decision take a job working in an office at the county college. By doing so he was able to surround himself with successful and motivated people.

Encouragement. Students learned to encourage one another by working in an office and at new student orientation. During the focus group interview students discussed how motivating others was an important aspect of their job, not only motivating each other but motivating incoming students at new student orientation. One student stated “I think a big part of a leader is not only having your team live up to its full potential but also have those people who might not think they have that potential or tap into their uniqueness and strive to achieve better” (Student C). From working in an office on campus and participating in student clubs, students learned and understood that leaders motivate others. One student believed encouragement was one of the most important aspects of leadership.

Students also discussed how working in an office setting helped them learn how to nurture others. The students learned to nurture others by helping them move forward when things go wrong. Students understood how important it was to nurture others in order for an office, department, or institution to be successful. Students also discussed helping others with weaknesses in areas at work in the focus group interview. The students felt that if some people were weak with certain skills or did not have knowledge about certain college policies they should still be able to work on that skill to gain a better understanding and strengthen their weakness. One student told a story about how their coworker was nervous about giving a tour to second graders. She ensured the other student that she would do well and provided them with a boost of confidence. Both students learned from each other and succeeded at their job.

The final subtopic of encouragement that students discussed was a leader’s ability to listen to others and value others input. One student learned this skill as being president of a club. She discussed how at meetings when planning events she would ensure everyone’s ideas were

heard. Three of the nine students that participated in the focus group felt that encouragement was an important aspect of leadership.

One leadership practice, Enable Others to Act, and two commitments from Kouzes and Posner (2012) align best with the theme of Encouragement found by the research. The leadership commitments of “Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6) and “Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6) best describe a student who was talking about the ability to share power and listen to others. She learned to value others input and listen to others from being president of a club. One subtopic that emerged from through encouragement was Motivating Others. The leadership commitment of “Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6) best describes this subtopic. Students learned to strengthen others by motivating incoming students at new student orientation.

Teamwork. The final theme found in the research was teamwork. Students discussed how they formed relationships and friendships with one another which led to them working better as a team. In the focus group interview the students began by discussing how they first began working together in the Student Activities office and were unfamiliar with one another. By the end of the semester after working together they formed relationships and a developed sense of community. One student discussed how their coworkers helped them, he stated “They definitely showed me a better way to be a leader, be a student. Even though we were only a team for a year, they still were able to improve my thoughts on school, and stuff like that, like the professional stuff. But this definitely created a sense of community just because again we're all close with each other” (Student D). Part of the student’s success of working together was due to their ability to adapt, which allowed them to form trust between one another.

Students also understood the importance of acknowledging accomplishments. This included personal and group accomplishments. One student discussed how his participation in a club allowed him to plan an event with the help of an administrator from the Student Activities Office. The event was highly successful and he acknowledged the help the administrator provided by naming him the MVP and rewarding him with a trophy. The last and most important aspect of teamwork that students discussed was trust. Students discussed how they learned to trust one another during a one-week training they attended to work at new student orientation. Students participated in ice breaker activities where they learned about one another leading to them building trust and forming relationships.

All nine participants in the focus group interview believed that teamwork was an important aspect of leadership. The nine students discussed the concept of teamwork and how they were able to form a team by gaining one another's trust. They also understood how important it was to acknowledge accomplishments and treat each other with respect. One student stated

Teamwork makes the dream work...What I mean by that is that every single person matters and everything that they do matters. Every time you do something with your partners, you have to be willing to communicate and be willing to sometimes take charge whether they're doing it right or wrong and see how everything comes about and at the end of the day, the rewards are going to be awesome. (Student A)

All students agreed that working as a team made their jobs more enjoyable. The students learned how to build a team and understood how it can help them as a leader in the future.

Two leadership practices, Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart, and three commitments from Kouzes and Posner (2012) align best with the theme of Teamwork found by

the research. The leadership commitment from Enable Others to Act, “Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6), and the leadership commitment from Encourage the Heart, “Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6), best describes the subtopic of Forming Relationships and Developing Community. Students who worked in Student Activities and at New Student Orientation together discussed how they were able to build trust through collaboration in different activities. The students understood the importance of the goals of the organization which led to them building more trust and developing a sense of community. Students celebrated their successes by forming working relationships and friendships. The leadership commitment from Encourage the Heart, “Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 6), best describes the subtopic of Acknowledging Accomplishments. One student described how he acknowledged a Student Activities Administrator who helped him plan an event by presenting him with an MVP trophy. This was important to the student because he wanted the administrator to know how important he was to the success of the event.

Through the use of a focus group interview and nine one-on-one interviews the research was able to find four themes which include the following: 1) Communication, 2) Confidence, 3) Encouragement, and 4) Teamwork. The first theme found was communication. Four out of nine students discussed how communication was an important aspect of leadership and a skill they learned by working at new students orientation where they had to communicate college policies to new students. Confidence was another theme that students learned while working at new student orientation. Students learned to be confident in their abilities as a public speaker and leader by talking in front of large groups of incoming students and giving them tours of campus.

The third theme found in the research was encouragement. Three out of nine students discussed that encouraging others is important to do as a leader and they learned to do so by participating in student clubs and working in an office on campus. Teamwork was the fourth and final theme the research found. All nine students that participated in the research learned the importance of working on a team and how to work on a team. Students learned these skills by gaining trust with one another during training for working at new student orientation. All themes identified through the use of qualitative research methods show the importance of participation in extracurricular activities at a county college for students to develop leadership skills that can last them a lifetime.

Limitations of the Study

This case study of one program at one county college provided useful findings about what leadership skills students learn and discussed where they learn said skills. There were four primary limitations that existed in the study, 1) Participants, 2) Time frame to complete study, 3) Relationship of the researcher with the participants, and 4) Limitations of conducting qualitative research. Each limitation is described in depth within this section.

Participants. The research proposal projected 12 to 16 students in the study that participated in the college's leadership development program. The projected sample was purposeful to represent of the ethnicity, gender, and age of the 45 students who participated in the college's leadership development program. The researcher emailed all 45 participants of the leadership development program asking for their participation in the study. Out of the 45 students emailed only 11 students replied to the email. Of the 11 students who replied, 9 students were able to participate in the focus group interview and the one-on-one interviews.

Although the researcher was unable to interview the projected 12 to 16 students, the participants of the research were an accurate portrayal of the ethnicity, gender, and age of the students who participated in the college's leadership development program. The 9 students who participated in the study provided the researcher with accurate descriptions of their leadership experiences at the county college during the focus group interview and the one-on-one interviews. During the focus group interview some students were timid and did not fully participate but during the one-on-one interview they provided the researcher with valuable information.

Relationship of the researcher with the participants. Eight out of the 9 participants in the study worked for the researcher at one point. The fact that the researcher had work relationships with eight of the participants can be viewed as positive because the participants may have felt more comfortable during the interviews. This work-based relationship can be viewed as a limitation because the participants of the study knew what the purpose of the study was, therefore creating a possible bias.

Limitations of conducting qualitative research. The researcher conducted one focus group interview and 9 one-on-one interviews. In the role of the interviewer, the researcher was responsible for recording, coding, and analyzing all participants responses to questions. One limitation that can happen is that the research can be influenced by the personal bias of the researcher. Another limitation that can occur during qualitative research is the difficulty in engaging interviewees in conversation when answering questions. During interviews some students stated they did not know how to answer the questions, which may have led to them not fully answering the questions to the best of their abilities. Another limitation the researcher faced was the volume of data that was gathered from the interviews.

Implications

This study focused on finding where students learned leadership skills and what skills they learned while participating in activities at a county college. The study identified four leadership themes and sixteen subtopics, or skills, that students learned while participating in activities at the county college. The data revealed what opportunities provide students with the most opportunities to develop leadership skills.

County College. With the knowledge of how students experience leadership, the county college can now provide students with more leadership opportunities. Most students stated that working on campus provided them with the most opportunities to learn leadership skills compared to participating in student clubs, activities, or the leadership development program. Working on campus included working in the student activities office at the front desk, working an information desk in the registration center, working at new student orientation, and working with other campus departments when necessary. The county college can capitalize on the data found in this research by providing students with more opportunities to work on campus. By doing so they will be teaching their students the leadership skills necessary to succeed in the future.

New Student Orientation. Student workers who worked at new student orientation learned valuable skills during a weeklong training. Students also learned how to speak in front of large groups of students. One issue that occurs is that only a certain amount of students are able to be hired. Administrators should hire more students to help them develop their leadership skills. One other thing administrators can do is include leadership training into the new student

orientation process for incoming students. They can also describe different opportunities the college offers for student to flourish as leaders.

Student Activities Office. One main theme that occurred throughout the research was students learning leadership skills by participating in student clubs and organizations. Student Activities administrators can use this information to try to engage more students in the experience of holding leadership positions in clubs or organizations. By recruiting students to participate in clubs, the Student Activities office will be giving students more opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Leadership Development Program Administrators. All students who participated in the research study were active in the college's leadership development program. Three out of the nine students who participated in the interviews discussed how the leadership program helped them develop leadership skills. This information gives administrators of the leadership development program an opportunity to see what they can do differently when teaching leadership to students. It also shows program administrators what skills students are learning from participating in the leadership development program. Program administrators can use this information to recruit more students to the program and change the curriculum.

Students. This research have proven that if students become involved in campus activities, clubs, or work on campus they develop leadership skills that can last a lifetime. With these findings in mind, students should seek out opportunities where they can develop leadership skills. Obtaining a job on campus is one of the best ways students can develop leadership skills. Seeking out employment on campus will prove beneficial to students in the long run. Students should also seek out opportunities to join or start a student club or organization. If they do so they can learn valuable skills that will help them in their future.

Reccomendations

The findings of this research, which are specific to one county college, may be of use to other colleges. Academic institutions can use the model developed in this research which examined the skills students learned including communication, confidence, encouragement, and teamwork as a model for future research. They can also use the framework and research method to learn how their students experience leadership.

Actions. It is reccomended that the county college continues to research how and where students are experiencing leadership. Furthermore, the college should begin to offer more leadership opportunities to students at the county college and continue to assess their leadership development program. The methods and approaches used in this research which included interviewing students should continue to take place as valuable information was learned. Understanding where students are learning leadership skills is beneficial to college administrators as it will help them understand their programs that they offer students.

Further study. This study occurred over a period of four months and valuable data was uncovered. Although the study provided valuable insight into where students are devleoping leadership skills, more information can be uncovered by doing additional research. To create a deeper understanding of where students develop leadership skills future studies should include all 19 county colleges in New Jersey. Including all county colleges from the state of New Jersey will create a large sample size which will create a large amount of data. By doing so, researchers can further evaluate how students are developing leadership skills and what skills they are developing. Future researchers should also consider how students will use their leadership skills they learned from the county college in their future endeavors and find out if students are using the leadership skills they learned outside of the opportunities outside of the college.

Conclusion

Students have always participated in extracurricular activities at college which teach them leadership skills. However, there is little research about where students are developing leadership skills and the types of opportunities they have to learn them in at a county college. This study documented students' perceptions of their leadership development experiences at a county college, one of the 19 county colleges in New Jersey. Four main themes and 16 subtopics were uncovered through analysis of interview and focus group data. The four themes that the research uncovered were the following 1) Communication, 2) Confidence, 3) Encouragement, and 4) Teamwork. The findings in this study were made possible by student's willingness to participate in a focus group interview and a one-on-one interview. The research suggested that students learned leadership skills from working on campus and participating in student clubs. Each of the four themes aligned with several of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Leadership Practices and Commitments.

This research adds to the knowledge of leadership development research for academic institutions, especially for county colleges. Future researchers should use this model of qualitative research to uncover more data at other county colleges. The more information uncovered about where county college students learn skills outside of the classroom will help fill the gap in research that exists. It will also provide campus administrators at county colleges with the opportunity to assess their programs and to gain a deeper understanding of how students are experiencing leadership.

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Appendix A

Research Proposal

University of New England Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

This proposal serves as the request to conduct research at Middlesex County College.

A. Introduction

My name is Kevin Dalina and I am a graduate student in the doctorate program at the University of New England.

B. Specific Aims

I am conducting a research study designed to document students' perceptions of their leadership development experiences at a county college.

C. Method of Data Collection & Analysis

The method of study I will use includes analyzing archival data about student leaders' demographic information, school status, employment status, and leadership activities. Archival data will be drawn from a population of 50 students who participated in the county colleges' leadership development program.

Purposive Sampling will be used to obtain 12-16 participants to create a smaller sample size to represent the 50 students who participated in the leadership development program. Students from the leadership development program will be sent an email asking for their participation in a study (Email can be found below). If there is a good response I will choose students who closely match the demographics of the participants in the leadership development program to participate in the study.

The 12-16 students chosen will participate in focus group interviews that will be broken up into two sessions so that a maximum of eight students will be in each group. Following the focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews will be conducted over the phone with the participants to obtain a more personal experience they have had with obtaining leadership skills at the college. Students who participate in this study will range in age from 18 and up and each participant will sign an informed consent form.

The following questions will be answered through the research:

- What experiences and opportunities at the county college do students perceive have helped them develop leadership skills? How do students characterize these opportunities?
- How do county college students characterize leadership experiences in roles such as participation in student organizations, leadership programs, or employment at the college?

D. Description of the Subject Population, Research Setting, Subject Recruitment Procedures

The study will take place at a county college located in Central New Jersey where the researcher serves as an administrator. The college has an overall enrollment of 12,064 students that includes a very diverse population.

Participants in this research study will be students at a county college located in New Jersey. Students participating in the research will be both full time and part time students who have been enrolled at the county college the Spring 2016 semester. The age of the participants in the study will range from eighteen and up. Students participating have either worked at the college in various on campus departments or have participated in or held leadership positions in student clubs or organizations on campus. They may have also participated in the county colleges' leadership development program.

To choose participants of this study, purposive sampling will be used. Students will be contacted via phone or by email. Students who are readily available to participate in the study will be asked to participate in the group interview and one-one-on interview.

E. Informed Consent

Students participating in the study will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form which can be found below. It states that students participating in the study will remain anonymous throughout and after the study. Students can also drop out of the study at any time.

F. Provisions for Subject and Data Confidentiality

All participants in the research will be asked to sign an informed consent form. All participants in the research will be informed of the purpose of the study and asked to consent to. Participants will be informed that participation in the study is completely voluntary and they can drop out at any time. During the interviews participants do not have to answer all questions asked and they will be able to leave the discussion at any time.

No names or other information that will be able to identify participants will be used during the study. Information obtained through interviews will be kept in a secure location that I will only have access to. At the conclusion of the study, recordings and transcripts from the interviews will be destroyed.

G. Statement of Potential Research Risks to Subjects

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

Because focus groups include discussion of personal opinions, extra measures will be taken to protect each participant's privacy. The researcher will begin the focus group by asking the participants to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the focus group

confidential. He will then ask each participant to verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential and will remind them at the end of the group not to discuss the material outside.

Only the researcher will have access to the data collected. Any tapes and transcripts of the focus group will be destroyed after one year or at the end of the study.

You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

H. Statement of Potential Research Benefits to Subjects

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study will help college leaders understand students' perceptions of leadership and how they experience leadership opportunities.

Students at Middlesex County College have different opportunities to grow as leaders. Leadership programs offered to students allow them the opportunity to develop their leadership skills in an educational environment. The research will allow the college leaders to understand students' perceptions of leadership and how they experience leadership opportunities. The research will fill a gap in research on county colleges. Research on county colleges' support of student leadership development is limited. This research will help county college leaders understand student perceptions of leadership development.

I. Investigator Experience

The researcher has been a student at the University of New England since 2014 and has completed many courses on research and research ethics. The researcher has been an employee of a county college for the past six years. He currently works as an adjunct professor and event manager. In his previous experiences he worked in the Student Activities Office and served as an administrator on the Leadership Development Program committee. More information on the researcher can be found below in his resume.

Proposed Project Period

The research proposed period is from September 1, 2016 to December 1, 2016.

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF STUDY

Students Perceptions of Leadership Skills Gained at a County College

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Kevin Dalina

Department of Education

28 Telegraph Lane, Sayreville, NJ 08872

908.672.1622

kdalina@une.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to document students' perceptions of their leadership development experiences at a county college. This study will document students' perceptions about their roles as leaders and the nature of leadership development at the college. Different student opportunities the research will examine are leadership experiences gained from participation in clubs and organizations, especially of those students who hold leadership positions. The research will also document students' experiences of leadership who hold jobs on campus in different departments like Student Activities or Admissions.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Students participating in the research will do the following:

1. Complete a survey providing the research with information about the participant
2. Participate in a group interview where a series of question will be asked pertaining to their leadership experiences at the college in person. This interview will be recorded. The group interview should last no longer than 90 minutes.
3. Participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher over the phone or in person. This interview will be recorded. The one-on-one interview should last no longer than 50 minutes.

RISKS

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

Because focus groups include discussion of personal opinions, extra measures will be taken to protect each participant's privacy. The researcher will begin the focus group by asking the participants to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the focus group confidential. He will then ask each participant to verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential and will remind them at the end of the group not to discuss the material outside.

Only the researcher will have access to the data collected. Any tapes and transcripts of the focus group will be destroyed after one year or at the end of the study.

You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study will help college leaders understand students' perceptions of leadership and how they experience leadership opportunities.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses to these survey questions and follow up focus groups and interviews will be anonymous.

Please do not write any identifying information on the survey. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.
- Any tapes and transcripts of the focus group will be destroyed after one year or at the end of the study.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board at 732.906.2602.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Hello Participants of the Spring 2016 Leadership Program,

This purpose of this email is to ask for your participation in a research project about different leadership opportunities that you have participated in while attending Middlesex County College. The researcher needs 12-16 students to participate in the study. The 12-16 students chosen will participate in focus group interviews that will be broken up into two sessions so that a maximum of eight students will be in each group. Following the focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews will be conducted over the phone with the participants to obtain a more personal experience they have had with obtaining leadership skills at the college. Each interview session should last no longer than sixty minutes.

Throughout the duration of the study and after your information will remain anonymous. If you choose to participate in the research you will be asked to sign an informed consent form which is attached to this email. The informed consent form explains the purpose of the study, risks, rewards, confidentiality, and information on voluntarily participating.

Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 908.672.1622 or by email at KDalina@Middlesexcc.edu .

Thank you,

Kevin Dalina

Event Manager

Appendix D

Focus Group Interview Questions

Model the Way

1. Has participating in activities helped you define your values as a leader? If so, what way? What happened? What are some things you learned?
2. Have you ever been able to model the way as a leader by using your personal values? How so? What happened and what did you learn?
3. Have you set examples as leaders? In what ways have your actions aligned with your values?

Inspired a Shared Vision

4. Has participation in any activities helped you define your future or create a vision of what you want to become or what you want to accomplish?
5. Have you ever created a vision for a group and moved forward with it? How did you do to do so?

Challenge the Process

6. Have there been any experiences where you have taken risks to change something or improve it? What did you do? What did you learn from this? Did it work?
7. Has there been any small things you have done that you believe have added up into large victories when trying to change something? What worked and what didn't work?
8. What activities did you participate in that helped you model the way or learn these type of leadership skills? Were you in a group? (Clarify question- how they learned it or exemplified it)

Enable Others to Act

9. Have there been any opportunities where you have built trust in a group and collaborated on something that was successful, whether it was planning an event or doing something at work?
10. In what leadership opportunities were you presented with to do this?
11. Were you able to enable others to act in a group setting?

Encourage the Heart

12. When working towards a team goal, how do you support members to realize their contributions?
13. How did you show appreciation to your constituents? Did this create a sense of community or a sense of accomplishment for your constituents? What was your evidence?

Appendix E

One-on-One Interview Questions

Model the Way

- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you model the way or learned to model the way? How did this happen?

Inspired a Shared Vision

- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you inspire others and inspire a vision? How did this happen?

Challenge the Process

- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you challenge the normal to make a significant change? How did this happen?

Enable Others to Act

- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you learn how to enable others to act? How did this happen?

Encourage the Heart

- What activities that you have participated in at the college have helped you learn to encourage others? How did this happen?