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## Students' perceptions of leadership and the ways in which LeaderShape influences the development of student leaders

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP AND THE WAYS IN WHICH  
LEADERSHIP INFLUENCES THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT LEADERS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

Student leadership development programs are an emerging topic of conversation within the field of student affairs. This paper uses the personal narratives of five recent graduates of the LeaderShape program to consider student perceptions of the effects of this program. A literature review discusses recent publications in the field of student leadership development. The interview data collected in this study confirm the findings of this recent research, including generally positive leadership experiences, improved racial relations, and the importance of small group interactions. Additionally, this thesis includes a cross-case analysis and discussion section that present several themes that emerged from participants' narratives. Recommendations for future research and practice associated with student leadership development are presented.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, METHODOLOGY, AND LIMITATIONS

Leadership plays a significant role in everyone's life, regardless of one's particular profession or field. Given the importance of this topic, it should come as no surprise that America's colleges and universities place high value on developing leadership potential among undergraduate students. According to Brubacher and Rudy (1976), Leadership development was arguably one of the primary objectives leading to the establishment of institutions of higher education in America. Just as the first graduates of these colleges and universities went on to lead our nascent country, today's students will soon join the ranks of those decision makers who are responsible for the resources that control the global economy. As a result of recent scandals associated with Enron and the power blackout of 2003, corporate leadership has become a popular topic for discussion (Bazerman & Watkins, 2005). Since student affairs practitioners strive to prepare current undergraduates for successful post-graduation careers, it is easy to understand why leadership development programs are gaining momentum at many colleges and universities (Andrews & Wooten, 2005).

### Statement of the Problem

Given the rising importance of leadership development in undergraduate education, it is the job of student affairs practitioners to ensure that the programs being used to teach leadership principles are both valuable and effective. This study is designed to determine the ways in which the LeaderShape program shapes leadership experiences of students at a large, public, four-year institution in the South. In particular, the research questions which guide this study include:

1. In what ways does participation in the LeaderShape program influence students' perceptions of themselves as future leaders?

2. What are students' perceptions of the importance of LeaderShape as a leadership development program on campus?
3. Based on student perceptions, what is the efficacy of LeaderShape as a tool for developing leadership capabilities among undergraduate students?

An analysis of the data collected from recent graduates of the LeaderShape institute may lead to several ways in which this program may be improved for future students.

The current body of educational literature, which is addressed in more detail below, contains a wealth of information about the importance of student leadership in college. However, there is a noticeable lack of research concentrating on the LeaderShape program in particular. College administrators need to know both what students are learning from leadership development programs as well as how students are using these lessons once the programs are completed. Currently, LeaderShape is being used to teach student leadership development by over forty colleges and universities, and no research has been published regarding the outcomes of this program. Thus, a significant need exists to evaluate the actual lessons which students are learning through the LeaderShape program. With the data gathered from this study, suggestions for improvements to existing LeaderShape sites can be made in order to further improve its efficacy with the undergraduate population. Given the increasing value of leadership development in the collegiate context, this study will prove useful to a variety of populations, including practitioners, students, and LeaderShape coordinators.

#### Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

I have chosen to conduct this study in a qualitative manner. Qualitative research relies on the views of participants as the researcher identifies notable themes while at the same time sharing each individual's experiences (Creswell, 2005, p. 39). In qualitative studies, the

researcher asks broad, open-ended questions, thereby allowing participants to play a significant role in shaping the ensuing report. Additionally, as compared to quantitative research, qualitative research strives to go into greater depth with fewer participants. The primary reason I have chosen a qualitative approach is because no specific, identifiable outcomes have been published concerning the LeaderShape program. An analysis of qualitative data allows researchers to identify themes and outcomes which were previously unknown. Furthermore, much of the available research on student leadership development is quantitative. The voices of the students themselves will provide a more complete picture of undergraduate leadership experiences to those populations described above. One of the primary benefits of this study is that it will provide a framework for future quantitative studies which seek to evaluate LeaderShape on broader levels.

As a researcher at one of the institutions where LeaderShape is offered, I have access to a population of recent graduates of this leadership development program. By collecting the experiences of several of these students, I am able to share an in-depth description of the effects of the LeaderShape program to practitioners who may not have access to a similar population of students. One of the major concerns with qualitative research is ensuring that the researcher captures the true opinions of the subjects without distorting the data (Creswell, 2005, p. 48). For this reason, I have chosen to conduct this study through a naturalistic inquiry lens in an effort to preserve the integrity of the subjects' responses. Furthermore, I employed traditional methods, such as member checking, to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

### Methodology

This study took place at a large, public institution located in a city in the southern United States with a population of about 450,000. Enrollment at this land-grant institution is almost

32,000 individuals, including both undergraduate and graduate students. In-state residents represent over 88 percent of the student population, and minorities compose almost 20 percent of the student body. The university recognizes over 350 student organizations which provide multiple opportunities for student involvement as both leaders and members. The university recently announced the creation of an academic minor in leadership development.

In order to explore the issue of undergraduate leadership, I conducted a series of three interviews with each of five recent LeaderShape participants in order to gain a clearer understanding of their experiences with this program. This progression of interviews follows Seidman's (1991) model for qualitative interviewing, which calls for a discussion of life history, followed by one on the event itself, and finally a discussion focused on the long-term meaning of the event. More specifically, during the first of these interviews, I asked the participants broad questions about their background in leadership prior to the LeaderShape retreat. At this point, the participants and I also discussed events at the retreat in general terms. At the second interview, I questioned the participants in more detail regarding key incidents which occurred at the retreat. Additionally, I asked the participants in what ways, if any, they have applied the key lessons learned during LeaderShape to their lives as both students and leaders on campus. Finally, in the third interview, I asked the subjects to discuss the ways in which they plan to continue their leadership development in the future. This third session also served as an opportunity to verify the accuracy of the data collected to that point. Each of these sessions, which took place between November 2005 and January 2006, lasted approximately one hour. In one instance, the second and third interviews were combined and conducted via telephone as the participant had moved from the area. Over the course of each interview, the participants were asked several broad



questions, followed by more specific probing questions. The general questions used to guide each discussion can be found in Appendix A.

I began this study by reviewing the rosters for the LeaderShape retreats which occurred in May 2004 and May 2005. I selected five names from these lists and emailed the students to assess their interest in participating in this study. All five students seemed interested initially, and we communicated via email to identify an acceptable time for the first interview. At this point, one of the original students failed to return my emails regarding possible interview times. I happened to mention this to one of the other participants, who then suggested that I contact her friend whom she met at LeaderShape. Thus, the fifth participant was obtained through a snowball method.

Prior to the first interview, I secured approval for the study through the Institutional Review Board. During the first interview, I discussed the purpose of this study with each student and explained that there were no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. I also mentioned that I would be using pseudonyms to mask the identity of each participant. Following this discussion, each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B). In this way, I provided safeguards to ensure that the participants would feel comfortable sharing information of a personal nature. Following each of the first two interviews, the participant and I selected a date and time for our next meeting.

Each of the interview sessions was recorded using a handheld audio recording device, and I transcribed each audio tape within three days after the interview itself. Once I completed the transcriptions, I then began composing each individual case study while also looking for themes among the five participants. Once I identified a topic which at least two participants had

discussed, I then reviewed the transcriptions from the other three participants in an attempt to find more data which supported the emerging theme.

### Limitations of Current Study

While the data in this study should serve as an excellent source of information about student leadership as well as the LeaderShape program in particular, all of the participants are enrolled at the same university. Thus, themes should be extrapolated to other populations of college students cautiously. Another limitation with this study is the fact that I had only one male participant out of five. This was entirely inadvertent as I primarily used snowball sampling when collecting my participant group. Finally, I am currently employed by the Office of the Dean of Students, which plans and evaluates the LeaderShape retreat each May. Although I am not directly involved with the LeaderShape project, the participants nevertheless may have been hesitant to use negative terminology when describing their experiences.

### What is LeaderShape?

LeaderShape is a comprehensive program which seeks to empower undergraduate students to maximize their leadership potential. According to LeaderShape's mission statement, the program is designed to educate students about leading with integrity, with the ultimate goal of improving student organizations and learning environments (LeaderShape, 2005). The key facet of the LeaderShape program is a six-day retreat, which is described as "non-stop self-discovery and learning from practical experiences that build your leadership concepts and abilities" (LeaderShape, 2005). LeaderShape programs are currently offered at forty-six institutions of higher education across the country for a yearly enrollment of approximately 2,500 students. When addressing the question of whether leaders are born or made, LeaderShape has created a third perspective: Leaders are shaped by both internal and external forces. Thus,

LeaderShape has developed a program which combines the traditional developmental needs of undergraduate students with the concept that leadership can be fostered through “reflection, planning, one-on-one interactions, small group feedback, and large group learning” (LeaderShape, 2005).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As the field of leadership development has become more prevalent on campuses across the country, the literature addressing this topic has grown as well. James Burns, author of the Burns Theory of Transformational Leadership, asserted that, “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (as cited in Adams & Keim, 2000, p. 259). Based on my review of the literature, it appears that much of the available literature is quantitative in nature in that it investigates the relationship between one or more variables as they relate to leadership development programs. This chapter will discuss research concerning the development of individual leadership identities as well as the ways in which gender and race influence leadership development. Additionally, research from the field of student development is presented as many of these theories have direct impact on students’ leadership abilities. Finally, this chapter concludes with the presentation of a recent study focusing on the risks associated with participation in student leadership activities.

Despite the recent increase in literature that discusses student leadership, few scholars have chosen to address the development of leadership ability or leadership identity (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Komives et al. argue that the leadership theories which focus on “traits, behaviors, and situations” worked well in the industrial era when society was primarily focused on production and efficiency (p. 593). However, in the new post-industrial era, society is now more concerned with knowledge and networking, thereby lessening the utility of the older leadership theories. Thus, they call for new leadership development theories that are based on “collaboration, ethical action, moral purposes, and leaders who transform followers into leaders themselves” (p. 593).

In order to create effective leadership development programs, one must first fully understand how leadership identities are formed, a task upon which Komives (2005) and her associates focus. Based on discussions about leadership with 13 participants, these authors developed a six-stage model for leadership identity (see Figure 1). This framework begins with the early recognition that leaders exist, which these researchers refer to as the Awareness stage. Leaders in this stage might include parents as well as fictional superheroes that embody a leadership quality. The second stage, entitled Exploration/Engagement, is a time when the individual becomes more involved in group activities, although not necessarily holding leadership positions. The Leader Identified, or the third stage, is a “leader-centric” phase in which the individual believes that positional leaders are responsible for all group outcomes. From here, the students realize not only that anyone in the group can be a leader, but also that leadership is “a process between and among people” (p. 606). The penultimate stage is characterized by a passion for a cause, as well as the commitment to “sponsor, support, mentor, and develop others” who are also interested in that cause (p. 606). Finally, the leadership identity model concludes with the Integration/Synthesis stage in which students accept leadership as an important part of their self-identity. Combined with the findings of this study, the leadership identity model is an excellent resource which helps explain the ways in which students develop as leaders.

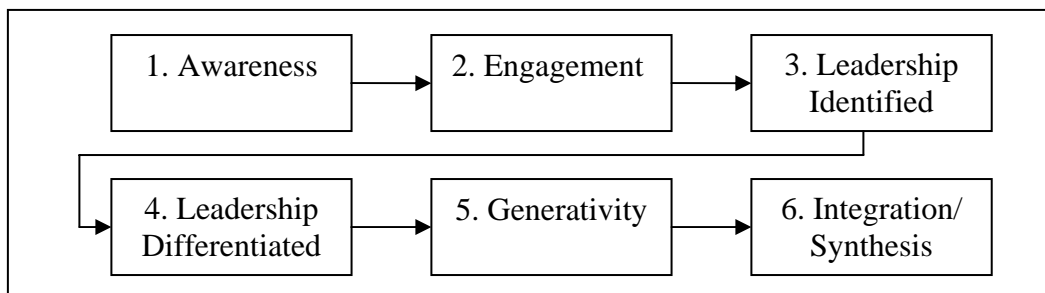


Figure 1: The Leadership Identity Model (adapted from Komives et al., 2005)

## Gender as a Factor for Leadership Growth

“Leadership development does not happen in a vacuum,” and additional efforts must be made to take into account gender and racial differences as these factors relate to leadership styles (Ruderman, 2004, p. 274). Kezar and Moriarty (2000) conducted a recent study which concentrated on the need for diversity within leadership development. More specifically, these authors observed that earlier paradigms of student leadership development were based largely on sample populations of Caucasian male students (p. 55). Consequently, many current strategies for developing leadership potential in undergraduate students are only moderately effective at best. For example, some models “tend to emphasize hierarchy; oneway or directive power and influence processes; individuals in competition for rewards; productivity; rationality; one way communication; formal, structured relationships with others; and separation between leaders and followers” (Astin & Leland, 1991, as cited in Kezar & Moriarty). Kezar and Moriarty suspected that this approach is no longer acceptable as leadership styles vary greatly based on demographic factors, such as gender, race, and culture.

In order to address this topic, Kezar and Moriarty (2000) used Astin’s (1993) input-environment-output (I-E-O) model to identify ways in which student affairs practitioners might alter their approach to student leadership development. In this model, “inputs refer to the characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution; environment refers to the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and education experiences to which the student is exposed; and outcomes refers to the students’ characteristics after exposure to the environment” (Astin, 1993, p.7). Change is then measured by comparing the input characteristics to the output characteristics. Kezar and Moriarty’s quantitative study of almost 10,000 students revealed that men, regardless of race, tended to rate themselves higher than women in terms of leadership

ability. Furthermore, holding an elected position was the strongest extracurricular predictor of leadership ability for Caucasian men while African-American men tended to gravitate towards volunteer work (p. 60). In other words, Caucasian men who hold elected positions are more likely to self-report higher leadership abilities, whereas African-American men who perform volunteer work tended to report higher levels of leadership ability. Not surprisingly, the results varied according to gender, and participation in a leadership class or program was the strongest predictor of leadership ability for women of all races. In general, the findings in this study imply that modern colleges and universities must employ a diverse approach to leadership development in order to reach all types of student populations on campus.

A separate study by Adams and Keim (2000) revealed similar findings among the Greek population. In an attempt to identify specific leadership differences among fraternity and sorority presidents, Adams and Keim analyzed responses from 233 undergraduate students (101 men; 132 women) at three public universities in the Midwest. This study asked the presidents, the executive councils, and the general chapter membership to rate the presidents' leadership abilities on a variety of factors.

Adams and Keim (2000) found that active chapter membership appeared to be heavily weighted towards sophomores and juniors (p. 264). This is not surprising given the additional pressures which college seniors face, such as graduation requirements and the search for post-graduate employment. However, it does suggest that student affairs practitioners might realize a greater benefit by focusing enrollment efforts for leadership development programs on freshmen and sophomores. The researchers also discovered that male chapter presidents tended to be older than their female counterparts. Similarly, women presidents tended to have less experience than men. Other gender differences in leadership styles also surfaced as a result of this study. For

example, the data suggest that “women chapter presidents may be taking a more participative/collaborative approach to leadership than men” (p. 265). Additionally, men tended to rate themselves much higher than their executive councils and general membership, suggesting “a difference in perceived leadership between men leaders and their followers” (p. 265). The opposite is true when looking at the opinions of female presidents as compared to their followers. Thus, the authors concluded that male leaders may be overly confident about their leadership abilities, while female leaders may be excessively judgmental of themselves.

These gender differences confirm Kezar and Moriarty’s (2000) findings that a diverse approach is needed when addressing student leadership development. For example, “self-confidence building exercises should be stressed for women, and feedback generating mechanisms should be employed with men” (Adams & Keim, p. 265). In terms of leadership development programs such as LeaderShape, these studies suggested the need for a variety of formats, including, but not limited to, small-group discussions, leaderless planning sessions, experiential activities, and feedback-intensive assessments. Studies have shown that people’s descriptions of a good leader often match their descriptions of a stereotypical male (Ruderman, 2004, p. 278). Thus, the formats listed above may provide the venue in which females can demonstrate their own strengths. These suggestions come from The Center for Creative Leadership, which has developed a guide for organizing leadership development programs (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004).

Whitt (1994) also studied gender differences as they apply to student leadership. Due to the major changes in gender composition at many college campuses over the past several decades, women now represent over half the student body at many colleges. However, these women are not taught the necessary tools required for leadership positions (Whitt, p. 199).



Similar to Kezer and Moriarty (2000) and Ruderman (2004), Whitt noted that women have traditionally relied upon a different set of skills than their male counterparts in terms of leadership. Indeed, women leaders tend to place a greater emphasis on relationships, seek more collaboration among followers, and share more information and power than male leaders (Whitt, p. 198). However, even though this research has been available for years, colleges continue to use male-oriented leadership development models for their students. In other words, women are expected to be campus leaders, but are not given the necessary tools to develop their skills.

Whitt's qualitative study identified several ways in which women's colleges foster and develop leadership potential among their students. For example, women's colleges have models for female leaders as well as numerous opportunities for women to become leaders.

Coeducational institutions can adapt both of these methods by promoting women to high profile leadership positions on campus as well as including leadership development programs explicitly designed for women. All female leadership programs, women's social and service sororities, and female residence halls are examples of programs which foster female leadership development (Whitt, p. 205). Like other authors, Whitt expounded upon the need for leadership programs which involve a variety of approaches.

### Race and Leadership Development

Regardless of the specific campus or even area of the country, the topic of diversity attracts much attention within the realm of student affairs. As former UCLA Chancellor Charles F. Young observed, "A diverse learning environment is vital to a quality education and to producing students capable of leading in a diverse society" (as cited in Antonio, 2001). However, efforts to increase student diversity during the 1980's contributed to balkanization, or the "self-segregation of students on campus by race and culture" (Dalton, 1991). In an effort to solve this

problem, Antonio recommended that practitioners review the traditional student development and socialization theories which have guided our field since its inception (p. 595). In particular, these theories, which include those of Astin, Chickering, and Perry, suggest that regular interracial interactions can positively influence leadership skills among college students (Antonio, p. 595). Although the quantitative research needed to confirm these suggestions is sparse, Antonio discovered in his study that “leadership ability appears to be enhanced by socializing and studying with students of a different race or ethnicity” (p. 607). Not surprisingly, students who had few close, interracial relationships experienced larger gains in leadership ability than those students who had numerous interracial friends.

Antonio’s research suggests that coordinators of leadership development programs should make a concerted effort to include both students from a wide variety of racial backgrounds as well as students who have had few interracial experiences. Additional efforts should be made to include a balance of male and female participants in an effort to increase gender awareness as well. Thus, given that student affairs professionals are charged with increasing individual awareness regarding diversity, research suggests that selecting diverse classes of participants in leadership development programs is one rather simple way to accomplish this goal. With proper facilitation, the casual interactions which can occur among these participants at the retreat would undoubtedly lead to unique developmental opportunities for all students involved.

### Born or Bred?

The question of whether leadership can be learned has been a much embattled topic within the field of student affairs. On the opposing sides of the argument are those administrators who feel that students are born with the innate ability to lead and those who argue that leadership

skills are teachable. A recent qualitative study sought to shed light on this subject by analyzing longitudinal data from 875 students at ten institutions (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). The data was collected as part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which is administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). Like Kezar and Moriarty (2000), the authors of this study also used Astin's Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) framework for analyzing the data.

Participation in leadership development programs led to a higher level of change in each of the 14 outcome measures used in this study, with ten of these measures being statistically significant. Most notably, students who were involved in leadership activities were "more likely to report growth in their commitment to civic responsibility, conflict resolution skills, ability to plan and implement programs and activities, and willingness to take risks" (Cress et al, p. 18). Additionally, through the use of control variables, this study discovered that gender and race had no effect on student's ability to garner benefits from leadership activities. If anything, the researchers discovered that Mexican American/Chicano students benefit more from activities which focus on university-community relations (Cress et al, p. 21). Such findings are especially useful to student affairs professionals who are charged with enhancing student leadership on campus. In sum, this study provides clear evidence that "leadership potential exists in every student and that colleges and universities can develop this potential through leadership programs and activities" (Cress et al, 23).

### Student Development Theory

The majority of the previous articles address the ways in which students develop across various dimensions, such as race and gender. As Antonio (2001) mentioned, there also exists a vast body of research on general student development which examines how students develop

cognitively as well as personally. In his study on the ways in which students develop intellectually, Perry (1970) postulated that students progress systematically through nine developmental stages. In advancing through Perry's stages, students progress from a simplistic, dualistic view of the world to a point where ideas are judged in relation to other aspects of life, including long-term career and personal plans (King, p. 37). In other words, students advance from viewing concepts in black and white to viewing these same concepts in shades of grey. Numerous events, such as interaction across racial boundaries and navigation of ethical quandaries, help students advance through the nine stages of intellectual development. Thus, leadership development programs have the ability to offer exercises which can aid students in their developmental process. Similarly, Chickering (1969) developed a model for identity development in which students progress from developing competence to developing integrity. Primarily, Chickering's theory points out that the student population will always remain diverse across developmental lines. In other words, at any given time, the study body at a college will contain students from all seven of Chickering's vectors. Thus, those administrators who focus on student leadership development will never be able to focus all of their efforts on just one aspect of identity development (Widick, Parker, & Knepfelkamp, 1978, p. 21). For this reason, leadership development programs must remain flexible and diverse in order to accommodate students from all levels of development. Hence, in order to successfully evaluate leadership development tools, including off-campus retreats, researchers will find utility in the fundamental models of student development created by Perry and Chickering.

#### Potential Benefits of Leadership Development Programs

Although there seems to be a developing need for a greater variety of leadership development tactics, student affairs professionals have long been aware of the potential benefits

which come to students who are involved in leadership programs. In their seminal work, *How College Affects Students*, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) discovered a direct relationship between the development of leadership skills and involvement in student organizations. Several years after these findings were published, two researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison attempted to identify the exact nature of these benefits. In this qualitative study, fifty recent graduates of the university were asked questions regarding their involvement in student leadership programs as well as the ways in which this involvement influenced their professional lives. In this way, Bialek and Lloyd (1998) were hoping to reveal the long-term effects which stem from participation in student leadership programs.

One of the principle themes which these authors noticed was that involvement in student leadership created opportunities for students to meet and work with a diverse group of people. This in turn led at least one student in the study to feel that the university was a less intimidating place (Bialek & Lloyd, p. 3). Such results support Astin's (1997) theory that peer groups are one of the largest determinants of both student success as well as retention. Enhanced leadership, management, and teamwork skills were identified as additional benefits which arise from involvement in student leadership programs. Another theme which these authors noted was that student leadership led to a heightened sense of self-confidence and professional poise (Bialek & Lloyd, p. 6). The connections between these skills and the benefits which they bring to a student's post-graduation career are readily apparent. Current student affairs practitioners can profit from this study by realizing the types of benefits which are enmeshed within participation in student leadership development programs.

Another phenomenological report which discovered similar positive results due to involvement in leadership programs was published by Logue, Hutchens, and Hector (2005).

These researchers interviewed six students in leadership positions at a large, southeastern university in order to explore the ways in which student leadership affected their lives. The only requirements for subjects in this study were involvement as a student leader and voluntary participation in the interview process (Logue et al, p. 396). After conducting these largely unstructured interviews, the researchers discovered that each of the six subjects described their leadership experience in largely positive terms. Furthermore, the students who chose to address the negative aspects of leadership regarded these aspects as minute compared to the positive gains which they garnered from their experiences.

After analyzing the subjects' responses, the authors identified three beneficial themes in regards to student leadership: people, action, and organization. "People" referred to the individual interactions which these students experienced as a result of their leadership roles (Logue et al, p. 399). Similar to Bialek and Lloyd's (1998) findings, the students in this study confirmed that leadership roles helped them find a niche, which indirectly affected their decision to remain enrolled at such a large school. The second and third themes referred to the students' abilities to enhance their planning and organizational skills. In addition to improving his leadership potential, one student attributed his success in the classroom to these skills in that he was able to keep his academic life balanced with his professional responsibilities (Logue et al, p. 403). Several of the subjects also enumerated the future workplace benefits which they perceived would come from their current roles as student leaders. Thus, this qualitative study has helped college administrators realize the extent to which leadership influences a student's life.

#### Risks Associated with Student Leadership

Unfortunately, not all variables associated with undergraduate student leadership are necessarily positive. A recent study suggests that students who hold two or more leadership

positions within campus organizations are more likely to self-report high levels of alcohol use (Spratt & Turrentine, 2001). Surprisingly, the subjects in Spratt and Turrentine's study drank twice as much as the national average and three times as much as other students (p. 59). The particularly troublesome aspect of these findings is that the sample for this study consisted of students who are leaders in minority and religious student organizations, a population which student affairs professionals have long assumed display lower rates of alcohol consumption.

Student leadership and alcohol abuse are two of the most prominent issues facing collegiate administrators, and this study suggests that there may be a correlation between these two factors. In studying this possible relationship, the authors analyzed data from the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey, a self-report survey administered to more than 700,000 students at over 1,000 institutions since 1989. The numbers reveal that 26.2% of students who hold dual-leadership roles consumed more than the national average of 4.5 drinks per week. In comparison, only 12.6% of students with one-leadership role drank more than the national average (Spratt & Turrentine, p. 62). Another worrisome finding from this survey is that the authors controlled for race and ethnicity, which are two of the more common predictors of alcohol consumption. Thus, by controlling for these two factors, Spratt and Turrentine determined that students who hold leadership positions are more likely to consume alcohol regardless of their race and ethnicity. As a result, it appears that a correlation between student leadership and alcohol consumption does in fact exist.

The authors proposes that "students with multiple leadership positions might have more occasions than those with a single leadership role to be pulled into the high-use leader column," suggesting that the more active student leaders are more likely to become heavy alcohol users (Spratt & Turrentine, p. 64). Regardless of the explanation behind this phenomenon, the

relationship between these variables holds numerous implications for all aspects of the student affairs profession. For example, leadership development programs have traditionally focused only on the risk management issues which plague leaders of student organizations. However, the article proposes that these programs might be more beneficial if alcohol education was included as part of the curriculum (p. 66). Given the rising popularity of leadership development programs, such as LeaderShape, these suggestions could certainly help reduce the somewhat surprising relationship between student leadership and alcohol abuse.

### Summary of Literature Review

Although certain risks do exist for students involved in campus leadership, the literature reveals that rewards and benefits are prevalent as well. As the body of literature addressing student leadership continues to grow, practitioners will gain improved insight into ways in which to help students develop their leadership talents. Indeed, the model developed by Komives et al. (2005) reveals the similarities which exist between leadership development and student development. Thus, students are simultaneously developing across multiple models, including Komives et al.'s leadership identity model, Perry's (1970) intellectual and ethical model, and Chickering's (1969) personal identity model. Although early leadership studies were based on the experiences of Caucasian males, recent studies have focused more on the innate leadership differences which are present across gender and racial boundaries. More specifically, literature from Whitt (1994) and Antonio (2001) provides data which show that females and non-Caucasian students view leadership differently than Caucasian males. Thus, as further studies are completed, practitioners and researchers alike will gain a better understanding of student leadership, which in turn will facilitate the creation of improved leadership development programs.



### CHAPTER 3: INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

As described in Chapter 1, the following narratives are taken from interviews with five recent graduates of the LeaderShape program. LeaderShape has been offered for the past two years at the institution where this study was held, and the first two participants attended two years ago, while the last three participants attended nine months prior to the interviews. Along with his or her perceptions of the LeaderShape experience, each of the narratives below reveals the student's leadership involvement prior to this retreat. Themes and similarities are discussed in Chapter 4 through a cross-case analysis. In order to protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms have been used in place of all actual names. The following table provides a demographic overview of the participants in this study.

Table 1: Demographics of Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Date Attended LeaderShape</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>
Courtney	Female	May 2004	21	Caucasian
Richard	Male	May 2004	21	Caucasian
Monique	Female	May 2005	19	African-American
Allyson	Female	May 2005	20	African-American
Melissa	Female	May 2005	20	Caucasian

#### “Courtney”

Courtney, who is from a small town near New Orleans, Louisiana, is a 21-year old Caucasian junior at a large, public, land-grant university in the South. When asked what influence leadership has had on her life, she jokingly responded, “Hello, have you met me?” Courtney has been involved in leadership positions ever since she was elected to student government in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Prior to her collegiate career, these leadership activities included

planning high school dances, conducting fundraisers, and regularly attending a yearly leadership camp sponsored by the American Youth Foundation. Her attendance at the leadership camp is congruent with Kezer and Moriarty's findings, which state that participation in leadership workshops and retreats is the greatest predictor of leadership ability for female students (p. 60). Once she enrolled in college, Courtney became involved in various leadership positions within student government, her sorority, and also a freshmen orientation camp. Her guiding philosophy is, "Well, there always has to be a leader, so why not me?" However, Courtney was quick to add that she does not mind being a follower if others want to assume the leadership roles.

Courtney's definition of what defines a leader is quite simple in that she felt that anyone who sets a good example should be considered a leader. She clarified that a person does not have to take control in order to set a good example. "Sometimes the not-so-visible person in the back of the room is a better leader than the person standing up front." Courtney also pointed out that a good leader must have integrity, or the willingness to make the right choice, even though it might not be the popular choice. She drew a sharp distinction between being an effective leader and being a good leader. Effective leaders have the charisma that makes people want to follow them, but good leaders are the ones who "do the right thing, regardless of how many people choose to follow." Not surprisingly, Courtney felt that a leader can be made as opposed to being born. "Anyone can use their particular gifts to become a leader since there are so many types of leaders." Therefore, in sum, Courtney believed that anyone can be an effective leader as long as they make upright decisions and lead by setting good examples.

Courtney's father tragically passed away the week before classes began during her first semester at the university. This event changed her life, and she noted that she has tried to live her life as her father would have desired. "He is one of those people that told it like it was and didn't

like to see people mistreated.” For example, while she was in high school, an event occurred in relation to the Boosters club which caused much “backstabbing” among the members. Courtney recalled watching her father stand up and tell everyone in the room to quit being so immature. This was neither a popular choice nor an easy one, but his actions that evening helped the members in the club move past their differences. After seeing this event, Courtney resolved to always “tell it like it is, even when someone might not want to hear [what I have to say].” Thus, whenever Courtney needs guidance for leadership issues, she often reflects back on her father’s actions and the lessons which he taught her.

When asked to discuss the common misconceptions which others have about student leaders on campus, Courtney quickly responded that most people think the leader “has to be the person up-front telling people what to do.” This answer is similar to her thoughts above on the defining characteristics of leaders in that Courtney reiterated her point that the less vocal people in the middle of the group can often be considered leaders in their own way. Courtney also observed that most people think that a good leader does everything alone. “In reality, good leaders are those who learn how to delegate and follow-up instead of just doing it themselves. Leaders need to let people learn in their own way. Just telling them isn’t going to teach them.” The way in which Courtney learned this lesson was through a rather unique exercise at the American Youth Foundation leadership camp that she attends every summer. Courtney remembered being told many times that people are different as a result of their backgrounds, but, as a member of an upper-middle class, Caucasian family, she could empathize, but not really understand the true nature of these differences. As part of this exercise, some people were selected to get a fancy dinner, while others were limited to just bread and water. “The head table with all the food could bring some to the other table, but no-one did.” As part of this exercise,

Courtney realized how it feels when other people do not care about you. She felt that this activity made her a better leader because she now notices when people are being left out or not treated fairly. More specifically, she now makes a determined effort to include the outsiders and provide a voice for those who are otherwise silent. Thus, Courtney learned this important lesson because she experienced it in her own way. “Had I just been told again that diversity is an important topic, I don’t think I would have become the leader that I am today.”

Courtney felt that all students should get involved in at least one leadership role on campus. While she admitted that institutional change does come slowly at the university, Courtney went on to point out that student leaders do have the power to affect the lives of individual students. Her advice to students who want to get involved is simply to “find the cause you are dedicated to and share your knowledge.” As discussed previously, Courtney felt that there are many types of leaders, and someone does not necessarily have to be in front of the room in order to make a difference. Courtney also noted that students who get involved often “enjoy their time in college more.”

Although leadership has always played an important role in Courtney’s own life, she nevertheless admitted in a somewhat chagrined manner that some aspects of leadership frustrate her. As a result of her leadership positions on campus, Courtney has come into contact with a lot of students who “do it just to get their picture on the wall so that people will know who they are.” She went on to say that these people “do not care about the cause” and are involved in leadership activities simply to “boost their resume.” A recent example involved a student government senator who spent an inordinate amount of money on a project just because his name was attached to it. “There was certainly a cheaper way to do it, but he wanted it to be big and beautiful so that he would get credit for it.”

## Courtney: LeaderShape and its Activities

Courtney attended LeaderShape a year and a half ago, following her freshman year at the university. She admitted that she was “a little skeptical about this program since she had already done so many leadership activities before.” However, she “fell in love” with the program since it offered an approach to leadership which she had previously never experienced. In particular, “LeaderShape did not pretend like everything was ok. If you had negative opinions, you shared them and worked through them.” Courtney also pointed out the effectiveness of the blueprint, or long-term plan, which all LeaderShape participants complete towards the end of the program. Thus, although Courtney has had an extensive background in student leadership activities and camps, she passionately feels that LeaderShape is a unique event which all students should have the opportunity to experience.

When it comes to LeaderShape in particular, Courtney offered a unique perspective in that she has attended the event twice, once as a participant and once as a student assistant. She noted that one of the main distinctions between the two years is the differences which existed between the two groups of participants. During the year in which she was a participant, Courtney recalled that one of the groups seized control during the Star Power exercise and consequently abused their newfound power. “[Star Power] really showed what people’s true character was like because the leader of the team with all the control was impeached as the Residence Hall Association president during the following year for being corrupt and misusing funds.” Alternatively, the following year, Courtney observed that the group was much more mild-mannered. Moreover, the head group during Star Power worked amongst themselves and formulated a way in which they were able to give away some of their points. “People always say

simulations don't always reflect true life, but they really do. Star Power makes you realize things about yourself that you might not have thought about before."

Courtney remembered that Vidari was another game which revealed differences between the two groups of participants. In that game, group members have to work together in an assembly line in order to successfully complete the task. "During the first year, I was the counter (the person in charge), but no one was organized enough and no one listened to the project manager. We had a couple too many chiefs and not enough Indians." This exercise is a prime example of why Courtney is willing to step back and be a follower whenever others want to assume a leadership role. Not surprisingly, this activity evolved quite differently during the second year since the group dynamics were much different. Courtney pointed out that "Taking one person away or adding one person to either group would have changed everything. In fact, the entire experience would have been different had one person not been there."

In general, Courtney felt that each activity at LeaderShape was beneficial. Even though every activity did not influence every student, "at least one activity reached everyone." The only aspect of the retreat that Courtney regretted was the lack of sleep. She remembered staying up late bonding with the other participants after the formal lessons were complete for the day. These late nights spent getting to know the other participants cemented not only new friendship connections, but also new networking opportunities which were available once the students returned to campus. Unfortunately, "[the lack of sleep] made it kinda hard to stay awake during the daily lessons, but that really can't be helped." Courtney remembered that the lessons, which are more similar to a classroom style of teaching as compared to the activities, were somewhat boring. However, in the same breath, Courtney pointed out that the lessons have great educational value, and should not be eliminated from the program.

As one of the last activities during the week, the students were asked to sit down with their clusters and evaluate each person's strengths and weaknesses as a leader. "That helped me a lot to see how other people perceive my leadership style. A lot of times I can be outspoken, and even though I think I am helping a situation, I might not be." Courtney remembered that this specific exercise taught her to be more conscious of the way in which she communicates whenever she is in a leadership role. Coupled with this lesson, LeaderShape taught Courtney that she does not always have to be the first to volunteer whenever a leader is needed. "If you give it some time, the quieter people will step up and do it. Often they are just not given the chance because the loud people like me jump in and get it done." Through LeaderShape, Courtney learned that patience does indeed play an important role within the world of student leadership.

#### Courtney: Lessons Learned through LeaderShape

Courtney attended LeaderShape following her freshman year, and, although she was involved in several organizations as an active member, she had not yet assumed any elected or appointed leadership roles on campus. However, formal leadership positions were not foreign to Courtney as she had held many positions throughout middle and high school. The fact that she was not yet a formal leader on campus allowed Courtney to reflect on her observations of other leaders with whom she had come into contact. "I learned to look for the person who wants to say something. You can tell when someone wants to say something and they don't. LeaderShape helped me look for that, and now I ask them questions and bring it out of them." Courtney had her first opportunity to practice this new lesson about three months after LeaderShape when she served as one of the leaders for a week-long orientation program which teaches incoming students the traditions of the university. "I was in charge of this group of freshmen, and a lot of them were very quiet and a lot were outgoing. As a result of LeaderShape, I could see some

people overshadowing others.” Over the course of that week, Courtney found herself working more with the quieter students since “their opinions are just as valuable as the loudmouths. Their voice is just not heard as well.” Thus, Courtney learned the versatile skill of working from her opposite personality style since she laughingly admits that she can sometimes be one of those “loudmouths” who dominates the discussion.

Separate from these skills and realizations which benefit her life as a student leader, LeaderShape helped improve Courtney’s personal life as well. “After my Dad died right before college, my brother got really mean. I never knew how to deal with him, and I would just get aggravated. I have a very dominant personality, and my brother doesn’t. He doesn’t know how to talk to people.” However, one of the first lessons learned at LeaderShape is how to identify and work with different peoples’ personality styles. As part of this personality analysis, the participants talk with each other about their personalities and natural tendencies. Courtney felt that this exercise taught her how to improve communication with her brother. “I called him when I got back [from LeaderShape], and I was able to deal with him better. Things have been 100% better since that time.” In this way, LeaderShape afforded Courtney the opportunity not only to become a better leader, but also improve the strained relationships within her family.

#### Courtney: The Critical Components of the LeaderShape Experience

Courtney had a difficult time identifying any negative or even non-positive aspects the program. After thinking for several minutes, she finally observed that a lot of time is spent “writing stuff down on paper and then presenting it to the group. That gets really monotonous after a while.” However, she quickly followed this comment by stating that these activities help improve the students’ presentation skills, which is certainly a critical component for successful leadership. Courtney also recalled that the lecture sessions, especially those after lunch, can get a



little boring for the sleep-weary students. Nevertheless, as before, she noted in the same breath that “the lessons are good, and I don’t really know how to change this part of LeaderShape.”

Thus, while Courtney eventually was able to point out several spots which are less engaging, she still feels that the integrity of the LeaderShape program might be compromised if these aspects were deleted.

Alternatively, Courtney was able to isolate numerous components which are absolutely essential for the LeaderShape experience. Primarily, she noted that the six tenets of LeaderShape, which are displayed prominently throughout the program, must remain in place. Courtney recalled that the way in which the students are split into several smaller “families or clusters” is important since it “gives you the small group feeling where you can get to know everyone better.” She also remembered that several of the exercises are indispensable to LeaderShape. As described previously, Courtney had attended several leadership retreats prior to LeaderShape, and she remarked that the “blueprint exercise is definitely a unique thing that other leadership conferences don’t do.” For this exercise, participants are asked to select a lofty, long-term goal which they would like to work towards during their life. Courtney’s initiative was to organize a high-profile, campus-wide presidential debate which took place two weeks prior to the 2004 presidential election. She also liked the way in which the students are encouraged to keep working on their vision once they leave LeaderShape. “In fact, I think that is what makes LeaderShape what it is. The follow-up. They check on you and make sure you are doing what you are said you would do. That gives you the extra motivation.”

After reflecting back on the specific exercises which made up the LeaderShape program, Courtney now feels that she is undoubtedly a better leader. More specifically, she stated that LeaderShape taught her to have more vision as a leader. “After looking at everyone’s long-term

plans, it encouraged me to get out and make a difference. I feel like I can make a bigger difference than I thought I could when I entered into the program.” Her ability to plan and execute the presidential debate within just six months after LeaderShape reveals the strides that this program helped Courtney take towards her goal of becoming a better leader.

#### Courtney: Post-LeaderShape Reflections and Plans

In addition to the leadership insight which participants accrue at LeaderShape, Courtney mentioned that she both made a number of new friends as well as strengthened bonds with old friends. When discussing these personal gains, Courtney commented that the conference afforded her many opportunities for networking. As a result, she felt that she is now a better leader on campus because of the contacts which she fostered at LeaderShape. More specifically, Courtney noted that because of this networking, she can provide more opportunities for the other members in her student organizations. “People will come up to me on campus now and ask my organization to jump on with a project. I would never have had that opportunity without LeaderShape.” Courtney also pointed out the family cluster facilitators, who are typically administrators from various areas of campus, provide another source for networking opportunities. For example, as a direct result of the networking at LeaderShape, one of the facilitators has agreed to present a business etiquette dinner to the student organization which Courtney leads. She half-jokingly commented that, “when you know people in higher places, they can help you get your goals accomplished.” Thus, the bonds created during the sleepless nights at LeaderShape continue to yield benefits for Courtney almost two years after she completed the program.

While talking about post-LeaderShape plans, Courtney added that she would like to have regular check-in meetings with the other students from the retreat. In addition to the social value

of these meetings, those students who have not yet completed their long-term goals might discover a sense of rejuvenation when hearing others talk about their progress. However, Courtney noted that a social aspect is essential if these meetings are going to succeed since “if all we do is just get together and talk about goals, then it might discourage people from coming that aren’t on track.” Furthermore, she recommended that two meetings a semester would be appropriate since “a lot of your LeaderShape kids are very busy on campus and don’t have the time to meet too often.” Besides renewing their commitment to personal goals, Courtney noted that these meetings would allow the participants to reestablish the important networking connections.

Courtney also expressed an interest in working with the different departments and divisions on campus. “We get a few of those emails for opportunities around campus, but we need more of those.” For example, she mentioned that Recruiting Services could easily use former LeaderShape participants who can speak highly of the university and its services. Courtney’s sentiments parallel one of the five ACPA standards for creating a learning-oriented student affairs division. More specifically, ACPA suggests that “student affairs professionals [should] collaborate with other institutional agents and agencies to promote student learning and personal development” (1994). As Courtney pointed out, the availability of LeaderShape graduates on campus facilitates the successful completion of this goal.

As Courtney approaches her final year at the university, she has decided to pursue leadership development as a career. “I actually have changed my degree plan to get a degree in leadership development. I want to spend the rest of my life training young people in leadership capacities.” When asked why she has chosen this path, Courtney commented that she has spent several years observing campus leaders who are involved for the wrong reasons, such as the

desire for popularity and power. “I looked back at my experiences with the American Youth Foundation and LeaderShape. That’s when I realized that I can make a difference if I can reach these students at a younger age and teach them the principles of real leadership. It’s not just being popular. I want to teach them the core essentials.” Thus, LeaderShape has not only influenced Courtney’s career path, but it also clearly effected her development as both a student and a person.

#### “Richard”

Richard, a 21-year old Caucasian male from New Orleans, Louisiana, felt that leadership is a combination of learned skills and innate talent. In order to be successful, leaders must be personable and feel comfortable when interacting with others. “You can try to learn that, but there could always be that little bit of awkwardness if you aren’t born with it.” Richard continued by observing that theoretically anyone can learn these skills, but only some people have the ability to do so. Concurrently, there are certain organizational skills which leaders must have which anyone can learn “if you put your mind to it and take advantage of the resources.” Richard felt that another requisite skill for leaders is the willingness to step forward and say, “I can do this.” As he pointed out, making this type of statement requires having pride and respect in yourself and your organization’s abilities. Finally, one of the most important leadership traits is the willingness to ask for help when one is confused or lost. “Leaders are those people who both know how to take charge as well as to listen and follow others’ advice.”

In order to be a true driving force in an organization, leaders must set the example by conducting themselves in the manner which they expect from followers. Good leaders are those people who are skilled at finding acceptable compromises between the extremes. “You can either be a dictator, or have absolutely no control of your group. Those two examples are bad leaders,

and good leaders are in the middle ground.” Richard observed that most people unfortunately assume leadership roles with the preconceived notion that they must push their followers around and be strong-willed. “People think that as soon as you get a leadership role, you are just better than other people. You are not.” As Richard pointed out, people do not automatically become great leaders just by stepping into a leadership role. Alternatively, “leaders must continue learning by letting other people take on certain roles within the group. You can’t be bossy and overbearing.” Although Richard’s formula for successful leadership appears to be simple, he stated that most people never reach their maximum potential because they fail to internalize these lessons.

Richard has been involved in student government for several years, and he used this example to reveal the general campus attitude towards peer leadership. “The common student doesn’t pay attention to a single thing we do even though we may think we are amazing and bettering the world.” Richard guessed that the majority of students would be hard pressed to identify what student government actually does. Furthermore, if asked on the spot, most students would be unable to name a single student leader. “If they do know a leader, they might think that person is trying to better the school, but I have found that they might also think that person is weird for wanting to be so involved.” Although he did not have any immediate suggestions for ways to rectify this misconception, Richard pointed out that students do not have to be involved in student government in order to be a leader on campus. “You are a leader if you are a driving force within your organization. You don’t even have to have a position to be a leader. You just have to be someone in the group who steps it up, notices what needs to be done, and drives your program a little further.”

In Richard's mind, leadership plays a significant role in both his personal self-image as well as where he wants to go in life, and he views the university as a training ground for his post-graduation career. "Right now, I need to see what works and what doesn't work. I need to practice leading groups so that later on I will have that edge and that knowledge to be successful." At the same time, Richard observed that he also just has fun being involved on campus. While some students get frustrated and overwhelmed with leadership duties, Richard enjoys the experience of "planning stuff and then watching the event just roll." If a certain aspect does not perform as expected, Richard uses this opportunity to improve the plan for next time. Thus, Richard truly sees campus leadership as a learning laboratory outside of the formal classroom setting.

As far as his leadership background, Richard commented that he was not overly involved in high school other than participating in Boy Scouts. "I was an Eagle Scout, and I was in charge of our troop for years. To a certain degree that was leading, but most of the long term planning there was done by the adults." Thus, Richard felt that he entered the university with minimal leadership experience, and, initially, he was not interested in any sort of student leadership activities. Indeed, his primary objective was to get into the marching band, but he soon discovered that band would not play a prominent role in his collegiate career. Richard laughed aloud as he reminisced about the beginning of his freshman year. "I was sad since I was just the second tuba in the history of [the university] to get cut. In high school, I didn't need to know any scales. I didn't practice over the summer, and so I was terrible." Most of Richard's friends were accepted into the band, and, because of their demanding practice schedules, he soon found collegiate life to be rather lonely. He remembered going to a September 11 memorial service in 2002, where he wound up helping student government members set up for the event. "They gave

me an application for Freshman Executive Committee. I applied and got it. Then, when I got bored during the day, I just started hanging out in the programming office in the Union. From there I joined several other groups and committees.” In this way, Richard’s career as a student leader began by spontaneously volunteering to help with a campus event.

Looking back, Richard remembered being told during freshman orientation that he should get involved on campus in order to meet people. He pointed out that his personal experience with leadership proves the validity of this advice. “In the end, I was just bored and needed friends. Getting involved really helps a campus of this size become small.” In other words, Richard felt that a student’s college experience gives back exactly what he or she puts into it. “If you want it to just be a place where you go to school and become anonymous, then you will become anonymous. If you want it to be a small home, and you take the steps to get there, you will eventually create a little safe haven that you will not want to leave.” In addition to becoming involved in order to meet new people and make friends, Richard returned to his rumination that campus leadership allows students to prepare for “the real world.” Hence, for students who are willing to put forth the effort, student leadership has the potential to yield significant returns.

Nevertheless, Richard warned that campus involvement is not always glorious and positive. His chief concern lies with the fact that so few individuals on a campus of more than thirty thousand students choose to become involved. Even though there are more than three hundred and fifty registered student organizations on campus, Richard observed that the leadership of these groups is often comprised of the same cohort of students. For this reason, a small number of students have the ability to shape a significant amount of campus activities and policy. “For example, [this cohort] can block out people that they don’t like, and I have seen it happen. I’ve seen people get wiped off the map at [the university] because they ticked off

someone in this core group of leaders. It is ridiculous.” A second difficulty which Richard has witnessed with campus involvement is student’s inability to remember their roles and duties as leaders. “The problem with peer leaders is finding the middle ground between being a leader and being a friend. That middle ground kills people. You can’t form special bonds and cliques because it drives the group apart.” However, as Richard pointed out, the campus environment offers an opportunity to make mistakes and learn these difficult leadership lessons prior to assuming similar roles following graduation.

Richard: LeaderShape and its Activities

LeaderShape is one of the primary vehicles by which the university strives to help students learn lessons in leadership. Richard, who attended the inaugural LeaderShape retreat two years ago, first heard about the event through the advisor of one of his student organizations. He admittedly had low expectations going into LeaderShape. “I thought it was going to be a week of training about leadership. I was wrong. It was a great experience.” However, due to the fact that Richard had already held a significant leadership position on campus prior to the retreat, he feels that he did not receive as much from the event as others. “I had dealt with a lot of difficult aspects of being a leader, so it wasn’t as effective for me as it was for the freshmen who went or the older people who have never had leadership positions.” Thus, although Richard enjoyed his experiences at LeaderShape, he felt that he had already learned many of the lessons through his practical experience as an on-campus leader.

Memories from several of the specific activities at the retreat still remain strong in Richard’s mind. In particular, he felt that the Vidari game was worthwhile because it taught the importance of teamwork and efficiency. The exercise also highlighted the value of being able to quickly adapt to change. “You always have to be prepared for something unexpected and be able



to get right back on task without stopping.” A second game that Richard remembered for its educational value was an exercise in which group members had to rank the importance of various survival activities following an earthquake. “You got to see others’ opinions and how they thought about it in their minds and then compare it to yours.” Richard observed that this exercise in particular revealed the importance of compromising with others. At the same time, Richard recalled having a more negative experience with the Star Power game. “People got angry because you stole from them. At the end of the night, it caused a lot of tension. I guess tension can be good, but I didn’t get anything out of it.” Thus, in Richard’s mind, some of the LeaderShape activities were positive and taught valuable lessons while others had little educational value.

Richard observed that his LeaderShape experience was different because he already had experience from being a leader on campus. Thus, while he didn’t learn much from the lessons on becoming a leader, he remembered learning from interactions within his family cluster. “My family saw me as a good leader, but they pointed out that I was over-dedicated. I kept hearing and hearing that, and finally it clicked after the week. I was dedicating too much time and spreading myself thin.” In response to this advice, Richard resigned from several campus committees in order to concentrate his efforts on Homecoming events. Although he did not entirely disassociate himself from those other organizations, he chose to be involved as a member rather than a leader. In sum, Richard was glad that he went to LeaderShape as he felt that the retreat was a valuable learning experience. Furthermore, he mentioned that LeaderShape produced several valuable networking connections with other students and staff on campus. The main realization which he obtained from the LeaderShape experience is that “some people will be able to change while others are set in their ways. People need feedback in order to change.

Sometimes the feedback is harsh, but it is needed.” Thus, although the feedback which Richard received during the week may have been difficult to accept, he realized that the resulting changes affected him in a positive way. He concluded by saying that, “LeaderShape didn’t influence me that dramatically, but it did leave some impact on me to make me a better person and a better leader. While I would still go back and do it again, I feel that it is really useful for new and incoming leaders.”

Not surprisingly, when asked to identify ways to improve upon the LeaderShape retreat, Richard responded that the Star Power game should be eliminated. In its place, he suggested more time spent within the family clusters would produce more effective lessons. Likewise, Richard pointed out that too much time is spent in sessions with the entire group. “The big group is nice since you get to see the opinions of everybody. However, it is more vital to discuss the stuff within the small groups. You get more interaction, and the more you talk, the more you learn.” Richard also felt that the LeaderShape retreat should include a student-driven activity which allows the participants to practice their leadership skills. For example, the year he attended LeaderShape, the students independently organized and threw a luau on the last night of the retreat. While forcing such an activity to occur would defeat its purpose, Richard suggested that the LeaderShape coordinators should present this event as an option, but allow the students to plan it if they desire. Finally, Richard pointed out that the leadership panel is a worthwhile event. However, he laughed as he remembered that the panel during his year was less than ideal. “Our group wasn’t that great since it was all just [friends of the Dean of Students]. It was his wife, his neighbor, and his college buddy, and that is how they introduced themselves.” Nevertheless, Richard felt that this event is a valuable element of the LeaderShape experience. “I like the idea of it, but they could get better people.” In this way, Richard felt that practical manifestations of

leadership, such as the party and the leadership panel, contain the most potential for valuable training.

As far as the long-term goals exercise, Richard observed that he likes the idea. He plans on becoming a teacher after graduation, and his goal is to create a classroom which is accepting of all people. “I liked how the exercise made us lay out the steps. Like for me, I need to take a diversity class or perhaps change my minor.” Thus, this component of LeaderShape produced a positive learning outcome for Richard in that it helped him organize his goals and realize the elements which must be in place before he can successfully achieve his vision. “In general, LeaderShape has a good focus, but like everything, it needs some tweaking. [The national organizers] have to be doing something right since LeaderShape is nationally known. It is also good for the university’s goals since it helps teach leadership to students.”

#### Richard: Post-LeaderShape Plans

Richard felt that the contacts he made at LeaderShape are one of the greatest long-term benefits from the retreat. He pointed out that, prior to LeaderShape, he knew about one-third of the students. “By the end, I knew everyone. It is nice to have this network in case I ever need anything. Even if I don’t hang out with them [regularly], getting to know them did influence me as a leader.” Furthermore, the cluster facilitators have been valuable contacts as well since these individuals serve in various staff and leadership positions around the university. This informal network proved to be invaluable when Richard was charged with planning two leadership conferences upon his return to campus. He felt that coordinating these two events provided him with an excellent learning opportunity. “That is leadership development. The hands-on type. I didn’t have a clue what I was doing, but I learned.” Thus, if nothing else, LeaderShape provided Richard with contacts who were able to help him with future on-campus projects.

In terms of a regular post-LeaderShape reunion, Richard stated that he would be in favor of such an activity. However, he pointed out that his long-term vision cannot be completed before he graduates, so this reunion would serve as a purely social event for him. “The people I still want to see and talk to, I see and talk to. It would be nice to see everyone, but I don’t have a bond or relationship with them anymore. I would like to still hang out with them since I am a social person.” In general, Richard felt that the key to leadership development is to never stop learning. “You may think you reach the pinnacle. There is never a stopping point, since there is always something you can gather from talking to other people.” In this way, LeaderShape functioned as a vehicle through which Richard was able to observe other people and learn from their ideas on leadership.

#### “Monique”

Monique, who is currently in her third year of college, is a 19-year old, African-American student who moved to the United States from Nigeria just before her freshman year. When asked about the effect which this move produced, she thought for a few moments before replying, “It was nothing like I expected. Back home we would watch American movies, so I had a rough idea of what it was like. But it just isn’t the same.” Fortunately, the academic coursework has been relatively similar, if not somewhat easier, for Monique, and she has almost completed all of her general prerequisites for her engineering degree. However, Monique noted that the real struggle has been the separation from her home country. “At first I didn’t think about it, but on holidays, I was the only one left in the dorm. I would just sit in my room wondering what I was doing here.” Rather than becoming depressed about the distance from her family, Monique instead chose to get involved on campus.

As far as role models in her life, Monique quickly asserted that she strives to follow in Oprah's footsteps. "I would watch her back home [in Africa], and she does great things for the community. She came from a horrible background, but still wants to help others." After several moments of reflection, Monique also noted that she admires one of the student affairs professional members on campus. "[She] is really nice, and she helped me when I didn't have anyone when I first got here to campus. I think of her as my American Mom." This woman, who works closely with student organizations, has helped Monique get involved in student organizations on campus. Thus, in addition to her international role model, Monique has also found someone locally who can help her set and achieve her leadership goals.

Monique's first experience as a leader came in high school when she was chosen as the leader for her press club. However, she observed that this was not a very active role, and that her first real brush with leadership came when she was selected to be a member of the Freshman Executive Committee during her first semester at the university. "I think there were about sixty freshmen chosen, and we worked with the chancellor about things that could be done for freshmen." During her sophomore year, Monique was hired as a Resident Assistant, where her primary focus was mentoring other students in mathematics. She remembered that this role taught her a great deal about leadership and management because she had to both plan programs for the halls as well as be on-call for emergency situations. These experiences, coupled with her role as an ambassador for the Honors College, taught Monique the practical side of being a leader.

Regarding the general topic of leadership, Monique felt that a leader is simply someone who has the power to lead a group of people. However, she quickly pointed out that one must be able to follow in order to be a successful leader. "[Good leaders] need to be able to listen, be

patient, and accept criticism and feedback from the way you lead the people. A leader should always work to be better.” Thus, Monique observed that leaders must know themselves before they can learn how to lead others. Not surprisingly, Monique was adamant about the fact that leaders are made, rather than born. “I believe that anybody can be a leader, but you must be very patient.” In this way, Monique’s opinions match Cress et al’s (2001) research findings which state that every student has the ability to become a leader. In addition to the traits above, Monique felt that leaders must also develop a sort of charisma in order to be successful. “[This quality] is different for different people. Whether it is being open-minded or efficient or balanced, leaders need this quality so they can get respect from their followers. These traits come with time and experience.” Additionally, Monique argued that too many people believe that all leaders are dictators. “Leaders do not always command. Leadership is a two-way thing, and you should be working with the people to gain their respect.” Thus, a theme of cooperation runs through Monique’s definition since she feels that leaders must strive to understand both themselves as well as their followers.

As far as her personal experiences with leadership, Monique felt that her involvement has helped to make her a more balanced person. “If I hadn’t assumed leadership positions, I would be using my time for other things. But I am using my time well to help impact others.” She laughingly admitted that if not for her leadership roles in college, she probably would have spent more time chatting with friends on the phone. “Being a leader makes me concentrate on schoolwork.” Thus, Monique attributed her nearly perfect GPA to her involvement as a student leader.

When it comes to self-perceptions of her abilities, Monique considered herself as a student leader. “I like to go and be the one in charge to accomplish something. I have also been

to several conferences and seminars on leadership. I am in the process of working on myself so I can help people better.” In this way, Monique has applied her standards and expectations for successful leadership to her own life. Monique felt that students should have two primary reasons for becoming a leader on campus. First, in accordance with Bialek and Lloyd’s study (1998), Monique felt that the collegiate campus is somewhat of a training ground for future professional activities. “[Undergraduate leadership positions] will help you when you get out into the real world. They help you develop the competition skills that you will need.” The second reason why students should become leaders is to make their voices heard. “A good leader can do a lot with the positions that they hold.” Hence, Monique pointed out that leadership can benefit students both practically as well as personally.

Despite the positive aspects of student leadership, Monique admitted that she occasionally becomes frustrated with the lack of progress. “Everybody is not together, and many times it feels like you are regressing when you come across conflict. It takes time to compromise.” However, she realized that the negotiation skills which she is learning now will be quite valuable later in her life. “Another downside is time. You have to plan things out or they won’t get done.” Based on her previous comments about balancing her life, Monique showed that her leadership positions have helped her learn the valuable art of time management. Thus, in spite of these irritations, Monique has been able to use these opportunities to further develop her own leadership abilities.

#### Monique: Lessons Learned through LeaderShape

When she first heard about LeaderShape, Monique was slightly hesitant about going since the retreat was right after the week of finals. “I had heard it was going to be a lot of work and that we had to wake up early and stay up until late at night.” However, Monique knew that

the event would not only be a great experience, but it would also help her become a better leader. “I heard that we would get to set goals for ourselves there, and I had never done any activity where I had to look at my long term goals.” She also remembered that she was excited about the opportunity to learn from other leaders on campus. For these reasons, Monique recalled that the decision to attend LeaderShape was not difficult.

As far as the actual activities from LeaderShape, Monique noted that she really enjoyed the time spent within her family cluster. During these times, “we would do little activities where we would talk about what a leader is and set stretch goals.” She then went on to explain that stretch goals are targets which can be completed in one’s lifetime, while visions are ideals which probably cannot be achieved in one lifespan. “For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. wanted to see participation with blacks and whites. That was his vision. Mine is to get kids in Africa the chance to survive.” Although Monique knows that she will probably not see this goal through to fruition, she is nevertheless determined to accomplish her stretch goal. “I am very passionate about kids, and my stretch goal is to go back [to Africa] and support an organization that is like a shelter for these kids.” When looking at these objectives which she has set for her life, the influence which Oprah has played as her primary role model becomes quite evident as both are striving to improve the world’s communities. Thus, Monique pointed to the goal setting exercises as one of the most valuable aspects of the LeaderShape program.

Monique remembered that the Vidari exercise in particular helped teach the importance of team-oriented leadership. “In this game, we had a cardboard pipe thing and a ball would be thrown in, but you only had two links of the pipe. We had to work together as a team, or the whole thing would have fallen apart.” Monique clearly felt that the games played at the retreat have significant educational value. On the other hand, Monique reported that the long hours



created moments of stress at times. Furthermore, the final grades for spring courses had just been submitted, and the students at LeaderShape were unable to check these marks. “We were away from civilization. Even though we were allowed to have cell phones, everyone was disciplined and did not use them. I think that helped us focus on becoming better leaders.”

When asked about the significance of her LeaderShape experiences, Monique definitely felt that she has become a better leader. The program offered her a chance to identify ways in which she can achieve her ultimate goal of helping children. “Going there really empowered me. It let me know that I could do it. It also helped with planning priorities in my life.” She reported that in the two years prior to LeaderShape, she volunteered on campus one or two times. However, in the one semester following the event, she has already participated in two major charity events. “[LeaderShape] also made me want to work with kids more. I baby-sit my neighbor’s kids now at no cost. I just want to do it.” In addition to her volunteer work, the training at LeaderShape also helped Monique succeed in her position as the Academic Excellence Chair for a student organization. “I had no guidelines as far as what to do, but I was still able to plan a panel discussion for our members.” Thus, in retrospect, Monique commented that LeaderShape helped her gain a better perspective about the traits of a good leader and how to acquire the necessary skills.

As discussed before, Monique felt that the stretch goal activity, which is also referred to as the blueprint exercise, really helped provide a meaning for her life. She always knew what she wanted to do, but LeaderShape gave Monique the encouragement and skills to actually accomplish her goal. “[The LeaderShape coordinators] helped me realize that Africa was too big, so I decided to start with my country instead. Next time I go [to Nigeria], I am planning to talk to people who might be able to help me with these goals.” Monique admitted that the inability to

work towards her goal right away can be somewhat discouraging. However, even though she remains firmly committed to completing her bachelor's degree in engineering, Monique has already begun working towards her stretch goal. After she returned from LeaderShape, Monique donated one thousand dollars from her first ever paycheck to a children's fund which helps suffering children in Cambodia. "I thought about it, and I wanted to keep the money in my pocket. But the more I thought about, I really felt pushed to do it. It was in line with my vision." Furthermore, Monique chose to email her cluster facilitator about her decision before she told anyone else. Monique's actions after LeaderShape certainly reveal the ways in which this program greatly affected her roles as both a student and a leader.

Now that she has had eight months to reflect on her experience at LeaderShape, Monique honestly felt that improving upon the current program would be difficult. "We basically covered everything. We talked about leadership positions on campus and ways to lead. We talked about ways to develop as leaders and we also had a discussion panel with experienced leaders from the community." After several moments of quiet reflection, Monique decided that the best way to improve LeaderShape would be to increase the size so that more students would have the opportunity to experience the program. "But it is important to keep the small family clusters. I would just recommend having more clusters." In addition to the family clusters, Monique felt that the introduction about leaders and how they are made is another essential portion of the LeaderShape retreat. Finally, Monique particularly recalled the free times at night when the students were able to bond with one another. "These pieces, along with the activities, make LeaderShape what it is. They can't be changed."

## Monique: Post-LeaderShape Reflections and Plans

The camaraderie which developed among the LeaderShape participants benefited Monique once she returned to campus. She noted that the bonding continued when many of the students got together to celebrate a birthday over the summer. “I see a number of [other LeaderShape participants] in various organizations, class, and my apartment complex. These are brilliant people.” Monique particularly enjoyed how these new colleagues were able to help her with various projects on campus. One of the students in particular has encouraged Monique to assume leadership roles on campus. She commented that this student’s influence was one of the main reasons why she chose to assume a formal leadership position in one of her organizations. In addition to leadership opportunities, Monique noted that LeaderShape has helped improve her social and academic networking as well. Another student at the retreat is now a computer science major who helped Monique with a particularly confusing course assignment last semester. “He is Pakistani, and I am from Nigeria, so it was cool that we were able to bond. You never know when your paths will cross and you can work together again.” In an effort to maintain these bonds and create more opportunities for networking, Monique is in support of having regular check-in sessions with other LeaderShape participants after returning to campus. She volunteered that meeting twice per semester would be appropriate as “that way, its not too burdensome, but we can still see each other.”

Now that she is an alumna of the LeaderShape program, Monique plans on continuing her development as a campus leader. She stated that she is planning on attending campus leadership conferences as well as volunteering more with local juvenile programs. More specifically, Monique intends to participate in the upcoming Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, an event which is organized by campus administrators to benefit a local high school.

“LeaderShape made me realize that I am capable of doing more. I went to a research program in California last summer, and I noticed that there were few minorities. So now I want to create a way to increase minority involvement in those types of programs.” Thus, the lessons learned at LeaderShape have encouraged Monique to not only pursue her lifelong vision, but also create other goals which help improve the social and academic communities on campus.

### “Allyson”

Allyson is a 20-year old, African-American junior who lived in Denver, Colorado until she moved south for college. When asked the reasons behind the decision to move so far away from home, she quickly pointed out that she wanted to be closer to her family members in Georgia and Louisiana. Indeed, her grandfather in Louisiana sat down with her and ultimately helped her decide which university to attend. Allyson’s mother, who raised two children by herself, has also played a significant role in her life. “Stepping out of my role as her daughter, I respect her for leading us through the trials and tribulations as a family. She has had mistakes like all of us, but I try to learn from her mistakes and not repeat them.” As this narrative will reveal, family involvement and advice plays a significant role in most of Allyson’s decisions.

In general, Allyson seemed more concerned with what one does with their leadership skills as opposed to simply learning the skills themselves. For example, when asked to describe a leader, Allyson commented, “When I think of a good leader, I think of someone who has a positive attitude. The definition is all wonderful, but how you apply that to who you are leading is more important.” Furthermore, Allyson felt that a good leader must be genuine at all times, not just when he or she is in the spotlight or being observed by followers. “What you do behind the stage or how you speak to me in passing on campus tells me a lot.” Similarly, she pointed out that a good leader remains consistently active in his or her organization and leads by example.

“If [the mission of your student organization] is community service, then are you actually out there with your group, or are you just telling the students what to do?” Her mother helped Allyson realize that good leaders need to be able to connect with each of their followers in a way which empowers each individual to be a better person. “My mom always told me that you have to know how to follow before you can learn how to lead. I want the leader to be able to come down to my level if I need it. Don’t pretend that you are way up above your followers and unable to get your hands dirty.” Thus, Allyson’s description of a good leader is someone who is both personable as well as capable.

Allyson also felt that the true test of a good leader is the way in which that person treats someone who has nothing to offer in return. She used the example of her boyfriend’s mother (“Beatrice”), who has helped Allyson tremendously as she struggled to settle into not just a new city, but a new culture as well. Even though Beatrice knows that Allyson will never be able to repay her, Beatrice “has literally taken me in and accepted me as one of her own.” Furthermore, she taught Allyson that leaders should not be concerned with what others think as long as they are making the best decisions possible. For example, when others question Beatrice for allowing her son’s girlfriend to live with her, Beatrice simply responds by saying that “she doesn’t care what [others] think, this is my house and this is how I run it.” Allyson felt that this issue of character is one of the essential leadership traits. “Charisma is nice, but having character and being personable are more important.”

In terms of other critical leadership qualities, Allyson quickly responded that honesty is of the utmost importance. Continuing the family theme, Allyson’s mother taught her that leaders who lie their way into a position are rarely able to successfully fulfill their obligations. “My mom always told me not to lie unless I am saving someone’s life.” According to Allyson, leaders

also need to know their followers. “As far as the leader goes, you must be involved so that you know what is going on with your people. With organizations on campus, the leader needs to know every member of that group.” Only after leaders understand their followers are they able to truly listen to the suggestions and guidance which their followers offer. “You can only listen to me if you know me, and a good leader needs to be able to listen. Finally, Allyson also observed that good leaders should be humble. “You need to show that you are not better than anyone else.” For example, many people look up to movie stars and sports heroes, “but superstars act like no one can touch them.” Allyson offered the following advice to those who aspire to be leaders: “Realize what you have and do not be conceited. Treat everyone as if they mean the world to you since you never know who will be there for you when you are falling down.”

As far as her own path to leadership, Allyson felt that she was certainly not born as a leader. Moreover, even though she was active in sports and extracurricular activities, she remained exceptionally introverted until her senior year in high school. She pointed out that college students need to be involved in order to stay sane. “You can get so caught up in work that you lose your mind thinking about it. Involvement helps you adapt to changing situations and not be so rigid.” Thus, Allyson believed that leaders can undoubtedly learn the necessary skills and acquire the necessary traits in order to be successful. As she pointed out several times, Allyson’s family has played a critical role in teaching her the essential abilities required for good leadership. Allyson also mentioned that, since leadership is a learned behavior, leaders are always able to learn more. “You can be a leader for a hundred years and still learn from your followers.” Returning to her observation that good leaders must be able to listen, Allyson concluded by saying, “You realize that people can give knowledge and insight, but you have to be able to listen to get that knowledge.”

“To be honest, being a leader is not important for me.” While Allyson certainly realized the value of being a leader, she pointed out that other priorities outrank leadership at this time in her life. For instance, her main concern as a college student is to graduate with a 3.0 grade point average. At this point, Allyson observed that she is at a stage where she wants to learn more about herself as a leader. “I want to be a leader for myself in my own world before I lead other people. I want to know who I am before I lead others.” For example, feedback which she received at LeaderShape taught Allyson that others often view her as mean and unapproachable. “That shows me that there are areas where I still need to grow before I can lead.” Hence, Allyson is more concerned with grades and learning about herself rather than earning the official label of “leader.” However, she pointed out that everyone is a leader in some way regardless of whether that person has an official title. “You lead every day because there is always someone looking up to you whether you know it or not. Thus, you should lead by example.”

Allyson admitted that she is quite biased in terms of leadership on campus. Although she would always encourage other students to get involved if that is their passion, she stated that too many are involved for the wrong reasons. For example, Allyson felt that there are several critical flaws with student government which prevents this organization from truly helping campus. “I feel that [student government] listens to the majority of the white students, but they ignore the minority’s needs.” Although she admitted that a leader is simply unable to please everyone, Allyson nevertheless felt that leadership on campus is misdirected. “I guess it’s my utopian dream, but I feel that if you are in a leadership position, whether its SG or the chancellor, you need to ensure unity among your constituents.” Thus, due to the lack of harmony on campus, Allyson felt that most campus leaders are simply serving in order to improve their resumes.

## Allyson: LeaderShape and its Activities

During her sophomore year, Allyson worked with Career Services, which is where she first heard about the LeaderShape conference. In keeping with her family theme, Allyson referred to her mentor in Career Services as her “Mom away from home.” Despite the fact that Allyson always “jumped on every opportunity that [her mentor] suggested,” she was somewhat unsure about LeaderShape at first. Indeed, Allyson’s first thought was that it was going to be “another one of those boring conventions on how to be a leader. Plus, it was a whole week, and I didn’t want to leave my boyfriend for that long.” However, after seeing pictures of the beautiful setting for the retreat, Allyson elected to attend for two reasons: “First, it was free. Second, I wanted to get away for a little while.” Thus, the opportunity to learn and improve her leadership skills played a minimal role in Allyson’s decision to go to LeaderShape.

At the conclusion of the first day of the retreat, Allyson was less than impressed with her LeaderShape experience since most of the activities were “the cheesy things” that she expected. However, after that initial day, Allyson felt that the conference evolved and became more personal. “We talked about stuff that we could apply to our own lives right away. I loved the clusters since that was our intimate bonding time. We had the laughing moments and the crying moments. It was just like a family.” Due to the personal nature of the entire experience, Allyson was at a loss for words when her friends who did not attend LeaderShape asked her to describe the experience. “What I got out of it might not be what others got. It could never be repeated. If I went back this summer, the experience would be different.”

Not surprisingly, Allyson’s two favorite activities at LeaderShape both highlight the skill of listening to others. “We played a game on our second or third day where we were all blindfolded and had names that went together, like peanut butter and jelly. The purpose of the



game was to spread out and then locate each other.” Allyson felt that this lesson had a direct correlation to leadership since leaders can often identify the goal, but have trouble getting to it. “Communication was the key. You not only had to listen and also listen to the right thing.” Allyson observed that, like this game, extra noises often prevent leaders from accomplishing their initial objective. The second activity which Allyson chose to discuss was the Earthquake game, where each group had to prioritize their actions following a fictitious earthquake. “This activity was very controversial because everyone had their own list, and we had to reach a group consensus about our top priority.” Allyson found this game to be somewhat frustrating since each member of the group wanted to be the leader who set the agenda. Although it took time to reach a consensus, Allyson realized that this game is quite similar to real life in that competing interests often play a key role in group leadership. She pointed out that listening respectfully while other members presented their choices and rationales ultimately helped the entire group make a better decision. Thus, Allyson was able to connect these two activities directly to her real life experiences as a leader.

In her view, Allyson already possessed many of the skills and values which LeaderShape seeks to instill into its students. For this reason, she felt that the retreat was “not a life changing experience.” However, LeaderShape did highlight some of Allyson’s weaker skills which needed improvement. For example, Allyson felt that the retreat gave her the confidence which she needs to become the leader and person she desires. Allyson’s long-term goal is to create a facility which assists women who have eating disorders and low self-esteem. This vision has a personal connection because Allyson works in the modeling industry and has witnessed the need for such a center. Due to the fact that this vision cannot be started until after graduation, Allyson did not feel that LeaderShape directly changed her as a leader. “The drive is there for me, but it is in the

back. My priorities are to finish school, but I definitely want to pursue my vision.” Nevertheless, Allyson appreciated the advice from LeaderShape regarding setting smaller goals in order to reach the larger ones. “Being raised in my household with my mother, I learned that no one plans to fail, but people fail to plan. I have repeated [the goal-setting process] in creating a month-to-month and year-to-year plan for other aspects of my life.” Thus, although she has not felt a direct impact on her leadership skills, Allyson felt that the LeaderShape conference at least helped her improve her goal-setting process.

In regards to the most important aspects of LeaderShape, Allyson responded that the cluster groups were an essential element. “The bonding within the clusters was a huge part of LeaderShape.” Despite her positive opinion on the clusters, Allyson pointed out that there is still room for improvement. “Sometimes I felt like it was childish when we broke into little groups with posters and stuff. I felt like it was a ninth grade activity.” She added that some of her fellow students at LeaderShape did not enjoy the clusters. “LeaderShape is a very personal experience. A lot depended on how well the cluster got along. It can be a good experience, but if you don’t like your group it is a bad experience.” After the time spent in clusters, Allyson felt that the times spent eating meals were the most valuable. “It was so relaxed and off-the-camera. We didn’t have a set agenda. When we were eating, everyone was being who they really were. I found that sometimes people went against what they just said in the meetings.” Allyson felt that these students who changed when they were “off-the-camera” needed to spend more time determining their true values and beliefs before assuming new leadership roles. Hence, in making her point that LeaderShape is a very personal experience, Allyson once again returned to the concept that leaders must know themselves before they can stand in front of others.

## Allyson: Post-LeaderShape Reflections and Plans

Although Allyson felt that LeaderShape did not teach her many skills, she still values the time spent with the other students. “I don’t know if it was LeaderShape or the college experience, but I now have more courage to approach others and talk to them.” Interestingly enough, Allyson used a family term to describe one of her best friends from LeaderShape. “She is my cousin. We may not hang out as much as we would like, but we chat on Facebook or get together occasionally.” Allyson pointed out that about three quarters of the friends from LeaderShape have evolved into purely social relationships. However, “There are others who remind me of who I am and what my goals are. I would often get frustrated when studying, and one of the guys was my motivation to help me get through.” In accordance with her point that LeaderShape is a personal experience, Allyson felt that each person from the retreat influenced her style as a leader. “They didn’t tell me how to lead. But those one-on-one relationships helped me realize who I am, and I became a better leader that way.” In this way, Allyson learned more from the people she met at LeaderShape rather than the actual activities conducted at the retreat.

Allyson was surprised at the amount of diversity among the students at LeaderShape. “[The retreat] was not publicized as much as I thought it would be, so I figured only those with connections would be there. I was pleased with the number of Indians, blacks, whites, Hispanics.” This racial diversity in turn led to opportunities for learning and personal advancement. In particular, “We discussed some of the stereotypical comments. We were real when we were there. It offended some people, but it needed to be said. It was nice to hear other people’s opinions on race.” Thus, Allyson felt that LeaderShape provided a safe venue to discuss racial differences, a topic which she feels is one of the most pressing issues on campus.

“I was very, very disappointed with my post-LeaderShape experience. I know school is school and work is work, but it was disappointing to come back and not get together.” Not surprisingly, Allyson was in favor of periodic meetings upon returning from LeaderShape. She acknowledged that pressures from work and school would make regular meetings a burden. However, Allyson offered the suggestion that a reunion prior to the first day of classes as well as a party near Thanksgiving or Christmas would be appropriate. She felt that these events might encourage those students who have made little progress on their goals to renew their efforts. Despite the lack of developmental opportunities following LeaderShape, Allyson remains committed to learning something new about herself every day. “As I continue becoming a leader, I plan on constantly learning. That will help me lead my life with integrity, which should be our first priority since we never know who is watching and copying our actions.”

“Melissa”

Melissa is a 20-year old Caucasian sophomore who graduated high school in the small town of Thibodeaux, Louisiana. Her first reaction to the word leader is someone who is able to take control in order to accomplish the task at hand. She quickly pointed out that real leaders are “not just out there to be seen, but they are doing it because it is what they want to do.” According to Melissa, the key difference between a real leader and someone who is there just for the attention is passion for the goal. “Someone who wants the attention—a glory hog—is not a real leader per se.” In accordance with the LeaderShape philosophy, Melissa also felt that real leaders can develop over time. “[Leadership] has to be developed. You need something or somebody to push you in the right direction. This aspect of leadership is quite important to Melissa as she reported that she was incredibly shy as a young girl. “For example, I would like get behind my Mom at the grocery store, and if someone I knew came up to say hi, I would just peek out.”

Melissa noted that, because of district re-zoning, moving, and her parents' divorce, she attended fourteen different schools before she graduated from high school. "That makes you be a people person. If you're not an outgoing person, then you're not going to really make friends, and you're going to be miserable. Moving so much pushed me in the direction of being an outgoing person." Thus, Melissa quickly discovered that leadership and involvement are easy ways to meet people and make new friends.

Melissa's first experience with involvement came when she moved in with her father and stepmother during junior high. "My brother was really involved in school there, so I got more involved when I met his friends." She saw this familiarity with leadership as one of the main reasons why she got involved at the high school level. Melissa attended Thibodeaux High School for three years, and, coincidentally, her academic counselor was also the director of the student council program. She laughed as she recounted that this same counselor also introduced her to the track coach, who encouraged her to join the team because she is tall. "One thing led to another. I was in student council, then I got into cross country, then I heard about yearbook, and this that and the other. I went from this little kid growing up on a cotton farm to this person who is like running the school almost." In addition to being the junior and senior class president, Melissa was also the National Honor Society president, yearbook editor, and Key Club president. "And I made a 4.0, too." Thus, leadership clearly played a significant role in Melissa's high school experience.

Melissa felt that leadership development is a building process. "If I hadn't gone through what I did to become an outgoing person, I might never have become involved at all." Prior to her freshman year, Melissa knew that she needed to meet new people, so she opted to attend a week-long orientation program where she met many of her current friends. "Everything you go

through, including [the Orientation program], just builds your confidence, and you get more confident and more willing to talk to people without knowing them. Even just working in retail, you have to talk to people there. Everything kinda builds.” Adjusting to life at a new school is second nature to Melissa, and she felt that her previous experiences helped her adjust to the university. Over the course of her first year in college, Melissa became involved in several different organizations, including the Freshman Executive Committee, the Residence Hall Judicial Board, and a social sorority. In this way, Melissa did not hesitate in quickly becoming involved at her fifteenth school.

As far as key points in her development as a leader, Melissa felt that her decision to pole vault during high school was significant. “It is very much a mental thing in addition to being physical. You have to visualize the whole thing, or you are not going to succeed. You have to visualize your goal.” Thus, for Melissa, the similarities between high school athletics and leadership are readily apparent. As far as collegiate activities, she felt that her attendance at the freshman orientation camp is the biggest reason why she is so involved on campus. While this camp is not designed to be an exercise in leadership development, Melissa observed that the different group activities forced someone to emerge as a leader. “The point was friendship and learning about the university, but you kinda get the leadership while you are there.” While she was at this orientation camp, Melissa remembered that she met other students who later encouraged her to get involved with other activities on campus. Interestingly enough, Melissa’s experiences in both high school and college have followed similar patterns in that her involvement within each individual activity or program came about as a result of participating in a previous event. Melissa has now been elected to a rather visible position within Student

Government, and she feels that this position will inevitably lead to new forms of involvement on campus.

When it comes to common misconceptions about student leaders, Melissa pointed out that most people think that “leaders are in charge and that they are always right. People also think that leaders are not going to listen no matter what you say.” She admitted that some leaders unfortunately behave in this manner, and that gives other leaders a bad reputation. In general, Melissa is a modest student who does not like to brag about the positions which she has held. “I guess I would be considered a leader since I do a lot of stuff, but I wouldn’t walk up and say ‘hey, I am a leader.’” She mentioned that she was talking to one of her good friends from LeaderShape recently, and he had no idea the types of activities which Melissa participated in while in high school. “He was surprised, but it wasn’t really pertinent to what you think about me. I want to be known for who I am, not the awards I received or the things I did in high school.” Hence, although Melissa has no hesitations when it comes to leadership positions, she chooses to focus on completing goals and making a difference as opposed to the actual title of the position.

Speaking from the perspective of a campus leader, Melissa felt that students should become leaders in order to get more involved with campus. “[This university] is huge. If you don’t try to get involved, you aren’t going to appreciate it. I know people who came here and still hang out with their high school friends, and they don’t enjoy school as much.” Furthermore, Melissa noted that a student does not necessarily have to be a leader in order to benefit from the involvement. By joining an organization on campus, “you find out so much more about what is going on, and you develop this love and connection to the school and everything about it. Once you have this passion, you want to do more which then pushes you towards the leadership roles.”

Melissa observed that students need to get involved on campus in order to get the full collegiate experience. “College is living on your own. It is meeting new people. It is learning different cultures and groups. It is so much more than just classes. You go to school to learn, but that’s so much more than just books.”

At the same time, Melissa pointed out that campus leadership is fraught with frustrations as well. Primarily, she does not like how leaders become targets for criticism on campus. For example, after assuming a position on campus, Melissa remarked that a student is more susceptible to be criticized by the student newspaper. “The paper is not going to criticize the whole group. They are going to call you out in particular. Being the leader of the group, you are more of a target.” However, Melissa stated that good leaders will not be affected by this type of negative publicity. A second frustrating aspect of leadership, according to Melissa, is the insincere type of student leader. “A lot of people are leaders because they want others to think a certain thing about them. They act fake and have this attitude about them because they want to put forward this picture of themselves.” However, she commented that people who lead for the wrong reasons actually end up harming themselves in the end. “Without the desire to lead, people see right through [this type of leader], and then they don’t respect them anymore.” Thus, the idea that leaders must have a certain passion in order to be successful plays a critical role in the way in which Melissa views leadership.

#### Melissa: LeaderShape and its Activities

When she first heard about the LeaderShape retreat, Melissa remembered that she almost decided not to go because she had to work. However, once she was asked by Student Government to attend, she talked to her manager, and he agreed to let her go to LeaderShape as long as she starting work as soon as she returned. “Going into it, I didn’t really know what it



was. I talked to people who had gone, and they loved it. It was supposed to be fun, and it was free, so I couldn't complain." Melissa recalled thinking that LeaderShape would be exactly like the leadership retreats she attended during high school. "In the end, it was the same idea, but on a different level. It had been upgraded for our education level and what we should be doing at that point in our lives."

Melissa attended LeaderShape almost a year ago, and she still remembers many of the activities as if they took place yesterday. In particular, Melissa recalled a week-long activity called "The Gag," where each student had to avoid doing an action which they often do. For example, "I know I am always the dominant one, so my gag was to not be so in charge." Melissa commented that this exercise was much harder to accomplish than she initially thought. "It was really hard a lot of times because the people in my group weren't necessarily take charge types. That made me really want to jump in and take charge." Furthermore, the small group members knew each others' gags, but members from the other groups were unaware. This allowed the students to see how others perceived them while they were acting from their opposite personality. Despite the fact that she slipped up and reverted to her old mannerisms several times, Melissa felt that this was one of the best activities of the entire week.

Another activity which afforded Melissa the opportunity to change perspectives was Star Power. "I had done [the game] before, so I couldn't participate. It was really cool to watch it. I stood up on chairs and helped police people, and that gave me a different perspective of the game." After thinking about this question for several days, Melissa returned to it during our last interview session together. In particular, she remembers that she really enjoyed "Crossing the Line" because it taught her that leaders often make tasks unnecessarily difficult. The rules of the activity are simply to convince your partner to come over to your side of the line. "The point is

that you should just switch places with your partner. At the time, I was thinking it was a stupid activity, but now I realize what a good lesson it was. Since then, I have often caught myself wondering how I can make hard situations easier.” The unique perspectives which these activities provided enabled Melissa to see leadership from an entirely different angle. This is one of the reasons why she felt that LeaderShape served as an effective tool regarding her own personal development.

When asked about less effective programs at LeaderShape, Melissa thoughtfully noted that she could not think of any. “The main thing I didn’t like about LeaderShape was some of the sessions when the lead facilitator would just talk and talk and talk. I have an attention span, and I lost it sometimes.” As far as the activities themselves, Melissa could not think of any which should be removed from the retreat. She observed that even when the activities were frustrating, there was always a good lesson at the end. She also pointed out that setting the long-term vision was rather difficult for many students. “Although it was aggravating at times, it ended up being really good. You constantly had to revise it to make it specific enough.” After many revisions, Melissa settled on her goal of creating a leadership program for primary and secondary schools throughout the state of Louisiana. “It would help them build confidence and develop them as people.” Nevertheless, Melissa knows that finishing her education is the primary goal at this stage in her life. She also has the maturity to know that she has not yet reached the point in her own leadership development to undertake a task of this magnitude. In this way, the activities at LeaderShape helped Melissa refine the leadership abilities which will undoubtedly play an important role when she turns her attention towards her long-term goal.

## Melissa: Lessons Learned through LeaderShape

Although Melissa's experiences in high school encouraged her to be more outgoing, she still felt that LeaderShape provided her with more assistance in this area. Specifically, Melissa recalled an activity where each family cluster had to teach part of a dance to the entire group. "I had to be in front of people that I didn't necessarily know. It just gave me more confidence to be out there and take more chances." Melissa also pointed out that LeaderShape taught her a more effective way to break down large goals and projects. "The ladder method helps me accomplish big goals by accomplishing small goals along the way. I definitely have applied that method many times since I learned about it at LeaderShape."

One of the most powerful lessons which Melissa took away from the LeaderShape retreat was the ability to learn one's own leadership style. "I find myself thinking about that often and trying to adapt to the styles of other people I work with. I am more observant now, and that allows me to adapt more to each person." This lesson is closely connected with the gag activity described earlier in that both teach participants how to work from their opposite personality style, an ability which will certainly increase Melissa's long-term effectiveness as a leader. After spending the last nine months reflecting on her experiences at LeaderShape, Melissa has concluded that the program did in fact make her a better leader. "I wouldn't have expected that as I went into it. I expected it to be like everything else I have done, but now I have more confidence and adapt better to other people." Furthermore, she felt that as many campus leaders as possible should attend the program. "Many times you find yourself in a leadership position where the other people around you are just clueless, and they are like it is 'my way or no way'. LeaderShape helps with that." Melissa was also impressed by the strides which her fellow participants have taken since returning from the retreat. In particular, several of the students who

were quite reserved at LeaderShape are now becoming involved in a variety of campus events.

“All of this comes from the lessons you learn at LeaderShape. I have been to so many leadership things, and I still got something out of LeaderShape. You know that’s a good program then.”

#### Melissa: The Critical Components of the LeaderShape Experience

When asked to evaluate the week’s activities, Melissa pointed out several positive aspects of the LeaderShape program which are essential to its success. She felt that the six-day retreat was the ideal length. “[The retreat] was really organized. If it was shorter, you would lose some of the valuable lessons.” She also particularly enjoyed the opportunity to meet and learn from the cluster facilitators, all of whom are campus administrators and leaders in their own right. As far as which activities or portions should be eliminated, Melissa thoughtfully responded, “I don’t think they should cut any of it. So much of it is vital, and you learned something from each aspect. There was nothing where I thought, ‘well, that was pointless’!” Melissa also observed that the location was ideal. “We were taken away from our normal setting, and we all had to live in the same place. Since we were out in the woods, there was no internet, and cell phones barely worked. It made you focus on the leadership lessons more than otherwise.” When pushed to identify one aspect of LeaderShape which needs to be changed, Melissa stated that several of the large-group lessons were long, which caused her to lose focus. She suggested that perhaps more time spent with the family groups would yield a more productive learning environment. However, as a whole, Melissa observed that she is glad she chose to participate in this activity. “I am glad I went. I made a lot of friends there and learned a lot about myself.”

#### Melissa: Post-LeaderShape Reflections and Plans

Since returning from LeaderShape, Melissa commented that she has spent a significant amount of time with people who she met at the retreat. Melissa actually met both her current best

friend as well as her boyfriend through LeaderShape. She laughed as she observed, “Ah, the benefits of LeaderShape!” Furthermore, Melissa now works with her cluster facilitator on campus, a relationship which first began at the retreat. In addition to the social aspect, she pointed out that these new friends and contacts also serve a developmental function. “We talk about our goals and what we are doing about them. We also talk about what we could do together as far as long term plans.” Melissa continued by observing that she enjoys getting feedback from many sources before making big decisions. “[The people I met at LeaderShape] offer good advice since most of them are involved on campus themselves and have that knowledge.” She pointed out that her family cluster tried to get together for lunch, but the plans fell through. “Even though I talk to everyone in my group, we haven’t all gotten together.” In response to my question regarding regular check-in sessions after LeaderShape is over, Melissa felt that these events would be beneficial. “Once every month or two would be cool. They would have to be voluntary though, since some people will not like the idea.” In sum, Melissa felt that, as long as the momentum remains, the networking which occurs at LeaderShape can produce positive outcomes long after the program itself has concluded.

In terms of her personal plans for continuing to develop as a leader, Melissa observed that her current leadership roles create difficulties in terms of time for more training. “I work [at a retail store] a lot, and I want to try to make it so that I only work a couple of days a week. That way, I will have more time to devote to school and co-curricular activities.” In the upcoming months, Melissa is planning on getting more involved by participating in more service opportunities through her sorority as well as attending Empower, which is a leadership conference for the Greek community on campus. In addition to helping her become a better

leader, Melissa noted that she likes having a busy schedule since she becomes less efficient when she has too much free time.

In addition to the personal development which she garnered from LeaderShape, she also enjoyed the opportunity to network with other leaders on campus. “I liked getting to meet new people, and I know that will help me as I move through my path at the university.” Melissa also witnessed the difficulties which can arise when such leaders do not work well together. More specifically, she described an activity at the retreat where each family cluster was given the task of balancing a large seesaw. “We had to wait a long time because the first group took so long to do it. Our group did it in just like five minutes. It shows how the group dynamic plays such a huge role in the completion of a project.” She pointed out that the ability to work with other leaders’ personality styles is one of the most useful lessons taken from the retreat. Finally, at the conclusion of our third interview session, Melissa sat in thought for several moments before she finally noted, “I think leadership is a really good thing, and everyone should experience a leadership role at some point in their lives.” Not surprisingly, this observation ties directly into Melissa’s visionary project from LeaderShape in which she wants to eventually create a statewide leadership development program for younger students. As she embarks on this mission, Melissa will undoubtedly have many opportunities to apply the lessons which she learned during a six-day retreat at a remote lake in the woods of Louisiana.

#### Summary of Narratives

As the above narratives reveal, each of the participants’ experiences at LeaderShape was slightly different. Although several of the participants offered critiques concerning various aspects of the program, each of the students reported that LeaderShape taught them new skills which could be applied to their leadership roles on campus. Due in part to the varied

backgrounds and opinions which students bring to LeaderShape, several of the participants noted that their LeaderShape experience was largely shaped by the other students. More specifically, even though the planned exercises and lessons remain largely the same each year, the actual experience is different depending on the composition of the particular group of students. The following chapter addresses more specific connections between and among the five participants in this study.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS, POLICY IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER RESEARCH

### Discussion and Cross-Case Analysis

When examining the themes and commonalities which exist among the five case studies, several important similarities are readily apparent. Most notably, four of the five participants laud LeaderShape for its networking opportunities. The connections which these students made at the retreat aided them in everything from help with personal academic issues to assistance in planning future events on campus. In addition to serving as sources for advice and leadership assistance, the contacts made at LeaderShape also simply provided sources of friendship for the participants. Komives et al. (2005) also addressed the concept that networking is one of the principal advantages which comes with participation in leadership roles. More specifically, Susan Komives and her colleagues suggest that society has entered a new era in which networking and information provide more value than the developmental theories which previously dominated the landscape of leadership development (Komives et al., p. 593).

A second theme which arises among these five case studies is the idea that students who find themselves in leadership positions should both set positive examples and maintain a sense of civic responsibility. Indeed, Courtney's very definition of a leader is simply someone who sets positive examples for others, regardless of their official title or role within the organization. This attention to civic responsibility is reinforced by other developments on modern campuses, including the rising prominence of centers for service learning. These centers develop opportunities for student learning through programs which reach out into the local community. Service learning is certainly a buzzword on campuses across the country, which may explain why several of the participants in this study point to the importance of civic involvement. For example, Monique chose to donate one thousand dollars to a charity in Cambodia, and Melissa is



interested in volunteering more in the local community. This finding certainly supports the recent study by Cress et al. (2001) which postulates that students involved in leadership roles are more likely to experience simultaneous growth in their dedication to civic responsibility (p. 18).

On a more personal level, several of the students mentioned that participation in leadership activities has made the university a less intimidating place. In other words, by joining groups and getting involved, these students discovered that comfortable niches do exist on what is potentially a vast and impersonal campus. This theme mirrors the findings of Bialek and Lloyd (1998) as well as Logue et al. (2005), whose qualitative studies found that involved students are more likely to feel that campus is an inviting place. Thus, in addition to personal growth, participation in LeaderShape at this large, public, research-extensive university in the South also appears to transform campus into a more welcoming environment. Furthermore, Monique felt that her involvement in campus leadership has not only made the campus smaller, but also assisted her with academic preparedness as well. Thus, for these students, participation in leadership activities contributed to the creation of a more successful campus environment.

Based on the findings in this study, attendance at the LeaderShape retreat also seems to boost students' planning abilities as well as levels of self-confidence. Monique and Richard both observed that their LeaderShape experience directly aided their ability to plan and organize organizational events upon returning to campus. These results provide direct support for Cress et al. (2001) who discovered that involvement in leadership activities helps students "plan and implement programs and activities" (p. 18). Bialek and Lloyd (1998), who also found that leadership experiences help students with future planning abilities, postulate that participation in student leadership leads to significant gains in levels of self-assurance (p. 6). This increased self-assurance then allows students to confidently make the critical decisions which are associated

with planning large campus events. This theory corresponds with statements made by Allyson and Melissa, who each feel more confident in themselves and their abilities as a result of the LeaderShape conference.

Finally, several students in this study commented on the way in which campus leadership and LeaderShape in particular provide opportunities to practice their skills in preparation for life after graduation. Both Richard and Monique employ the words “training ground” when discussing their experiences with student leadership. As Richard points out, the “real world” is quickly approaching, and he views his time at the university as a chance to discover which leadership methods succeed when put into practice. These sentiments correspond with the study by Logue et al. (2005) which discovered that students who participate in campus leadership feel that they will be better prepared for the professional workplace. Similar to this theme of preparedness, three students also spoke in positive terms about the long-term vision which they were required to create at LeaderShape. By asking students to map out their long-term goals, the retreat helped participants identify immediate changes which might then improve their opportunity for learning experiences while still in the “training ground” of the collegiate campus. Hence, several notable themes exist within this research data regarding personal improvements which occurred as a direct result of the LeaderShape conference.

#### LeaderShape: A Unique Experience

One of the most prevalent similarities contained within this report’s data is the positive language used to describe the LeaderShape retreat. Each of the five participants described their experience in positive terms. Even Allyson and Richard, who both offered numerous critiques of LeaderShape, felt that their overall experience at the retreat was positive. An answer to this use of positive language can be found within the research by Logue et al. (2005). After interviewing

six students at a large, southeastern university, these researchers discovered that their participants also used mostly positive vocabulary to describe their leadership development experiences. Hence, students either really do largely enjoy leadership exercises, or are quite hesitant to verbalize the negative aspects of their experiences. Regardless of the reason, the participants in this study are quite clear in stating that LeaderShape is different than other leadership conferences. Surprisingly, several of the participants embarked on the LeaderShape retreat with low expectations in mind. For example, Allyson mentions that one of the primary reasons she attended the conference was because it was free of charge. Likewise, Melissa and Courtney were skeptical of the differences which LeaderShape offered since they had already attended numerous leadership conferences in high school. However, all five participants were able to identify several ways in which LeaderShape helped them improve both personally and professionally as campus leaders. Nevertheless, the critiques and skepticisms expressed by these participants remind us that there is always room for more research and programmatic improvements.

As far as specific aspects which make LeaderShape unique, the participants repeatedly point to the time spent discussing leadership issues within the small clusters. As Richard observes, real learning takes place when students have the opportunity to discuss and debate the issues amongst themselves. As discussed in the literature review above, the Center for Creative Leadership (2004) advocates the need for a variety of leadership development formats, and, thus, the family clusters at LeaderShape certainly provide an ideal setting for student learning. Additionally, Antonio (2001) argues that leadership experiences can be heightened by ensuring a mixture of racial and social backgrounds among the participants. Allyson directly reflected this argument when she pointed out the learning opportunities which occurred as a result of the

variety of racial backgrounds among the LeaderShape participants. In this way, family clusters and racial diversity are two of the prominent themes which made the LeaderShape experience unique as compared to other exercises in leadership development.

In general, the participants in this study offer similar criticisms of student leadership. More specifically, the students lamented the fact that many on-campus leaders are involved simply to boost their resumes rather than to improve university life. Courtney and Allyson felt that most students who hold leadership positions are involved primarily to improve their resumes. Melissa stated that such students should not be considered real leaders as this label should be reserved for those who express a genuine passion for improving campus life. Secondly, three of the five participants also criticized the prevailing sentiment that good leaders are those who do everything. In accordance with Komives et al. (2005), these participants observe that good leaders are actually those who empower and encourage their followers to become leaders themselves. Based on the feedback received in this study, LeaderShape teaches lessons, such as the importance of self-knowledge and teamwork, which strive to dispel these two common critiques of student leadership. Thus, the philosophy and lessons taught at the LeaderShape retreat are providing students with tools to counter these common criticisms which remain prevalent on modern campuses.

#### Leadership Development of Participants

Using the Leadership Identity Model developed by Komives et al. (2005) as a framework, LeaderShape helped the participants in this study progress into a deeper understanding of themselves as leaders. As mentioned in the case study above, Courtney views leadership as an integral component of her life. In response to my question of whether or not she is a leader, Courtney laughed, “Hello, have you met me?” Thus, Courtney was most likely

already in the transition phase between stages five and six of the Leadership Identity Model prior to her participation in LeaderShape. However, I feel that LeaderShape showed Courtney the value of long-term planning and goal-setting in the context of leadership development. In particular, Courtney pointed to the value of setting stretch goals, a skill which she learned at LeaderShape. In this way, the LeaderShape conference helped Courtney move into stage six of the model, as she now accepts leadership as part of her personal self-identity.

Alternatively, I feel that Richard was at the second stage of the model when he participated in the LeaderShape retreat. He had just recently become involved in group activities on campus, and leadership was a fairly new concept to him at the time. As a result of his experiences in campus leadership and his attendance at LeaderShape, Richard has likely progressed into the fourth stage of leadership identity. More specifically, his case study reveals that he now realizes the importance of communication and experience in order to be a successful leader. Thus, Richard understands that leadership is “a process between and among people,” which is the defining characteristic of the fourth stage in this model (Komives et al., 2005, p. 606).

Monique came to college with little experience in the field of leadership. As she observed during the first interview, Monique had recently begun identifying role models who embody admirable leadership abilities. For this reason, Monique was likely in stage one of the model prior to attending LeaderShape. However, based on her personal beliefs and her experience at LeaderShape, Monique has chosen to become more involved in the community and on campus in the nine months since LeaderShape. Furthermore, she was not only willing to assume a leadership role in one of these organizations, but she also planned a large event for this group

with little help from the other members. Thus, I feel that Monique is currently in the transition phase between stages two and three of the Leadership Identity Model.

Allyson came to college with a strong personal awareness of the ways in which leaders are supposed to act. Based on her definition, one of the most important traits of a leader is the ability to work closely with one's followers and not feel that the leader is more important than everyone else. Thus, prior to LeaderShape, Allyson was at stage four of the model as she clearly understood that leadership is a collaborative process between leaders and followers. Although she is not avoiding further leadership opportunities, Allyson clearly stated in her third interview that her current priority is graduation from college. While I feel that Allyson benefited from her experiences at LeaderShape, at this point I do not feel that she has progressed into stage five of the Leadership Identity Model. Once she completes her current goals, Allyson may then be able to devote more time to the sponsorship and development of others' abilities.

Finally, Melissa is similar to Courtney in that she came to college with a large amount of leadership experience. However, Melissa feels that the main purpose of a leader is to ensure that the project at hand is completed, which is one of the defining trademarks of the third stage of the model. One of the critical components of the LeaderShape retreat in Melissa's opinion was the opportunity for networking with other students and staff from the campus community.

LeaderShape helped Melissa realize the value of other people in the leadership process, and, for this reason, I feel that this retreat helped Melissa move into the transition phase between stages three and four. Once she gains a complete understanding of leadership as a group process, Melissa will have displayed all of the characteristics of an individual in stage four of the Leadership Identity Model.

As these evaluations show, Komives et al.'s (2005) model provides a useful framework for evaluating the leadership identities of students. The participants in this study certainly developed a more thorough understanding of leadership as a result of the LeaderShape retreat, thus revealing the value of this event in terms of student leadership development. However, the common critique of broad theoretical models is noticeable in these case studies as well. More specifically, although the model described some students, such as Courtney and Richard, perfectly, the framework was unable to provide an accurate description for others, such as Monique. Based on my interactions with her, Monique is a mature student who is ready for leadership responsibilities in the near future. However, according to the Leadership Identity Model, Monique falls somewhere between stages two and three. Despite these criticisms, the model still serves as a useful tool for practitioners and students alike to identify the stages of leadership identity development. The following policy implications provide useful suggestions for improvements to the LeaderShape retreat. These changes will in turn improve students' insight into their personal leadership development and help them move towards a more complete integration of leadership into their daily lives as detailed in the Leadership Identity Model.

### Policy Implications

As with any study which evaluates student perceptions, it is important to determine whether aspects of the program can be altered or removed in order to provide better experiences for future students. Based on the interview data from this study as well as direct input from the participants themselves, several suggestions have arisen which may improve the LeaderShape conference for future students. The time spent discussing leadership issues within the family clusters appears to be one of the most valuable assets of the conference. Additionally, several participants criticized the amount of time spent in lecture sessions with the full group. With this

feedback in mind, LeaderShape facilitators should consider changing the program to offer more time in clusters and less time in full group meetings. According to the participants, the full sessions served a vital function in the education of students, and the recommendation is not to eliminate this portion of LeaderShape entirely. Furthermore, the participants repeatedly mention several of the activities in particular, most notably Vidari, the Earthquake game, and Star Power. As Courtney observed, leadership lessons are more easily understood in experiential settings as compared to classroom settings. Thus, these games certainly play a significant role in the conference, and LeaderShape facilitators should consider adding other games of similar educational value. Likewise, two participants mentioned that the value in these games is diminished due to the fact that the university uses these exercises for their own on-campus leadership conferences. More specifically, students have already played these games and know the lessons which are being taught. Numerous other games exist which contain these same lessons, and, thus, those staff members who plan university leadership exercises should seek to use original games in order to preserve the integrity of the LeaderShape retreat.

A second recommendation which arises repeatedly in this study's data is the need for improved follow-up after the LeaderShape retreat concludes. Every participant was in favor of regular check-in sessions about twice per semester following LeaderShape. These gatherings would be organized by the university and would provide students the opportunity to reestablish networking connections with both other students as well as cluster facilitators. A further benefit of these gatherings would be to allow students to reaffirm their commitments to their individual visions and long-term goals. Based on the data in this study, LeaderShape graduates are likely to be willing to attend such events provided that attendance is voluntary and the gatherings include an opportunity for socializing with other students and staff members. With this in mind, the



university could arrange for a speaker to discuss leadership development for thirty minutes followed by another thirty minutes for networking through socializing. In addition to meeting with the full LeaderShape contingent, individual follow-up communications between cluster facilitators and students would prove useful as well. However, as the university considers implementing these changes, it is important to monitor the volume of overall communication so as not to overwhelm students and thus alienate them from the available resources. This relatively simple addition to the LeaderShape program should create valuable returns in the form of greater student commitment to leadership education.

The diversity, along both race and gender lines, of the student population at LeaderShape was mentioned by several participants. As discussed in the literature review, significant leadership differences exist among races and between genders. Allyson observed that the diversity at LeaderShape created a unique opportunity for interaction which in turn led to increased awareness of diversity issues as they apply to leadership development. Thus, the university should be encouraged to improve their efforts towards recruiting a diverse student contingent at LeaderShape. In addition to the current avenues used to recruit students, the university should consider increasing the amount of LeaderShape advertisements among student groups which traditionally serve minority populations. For example, the university already recognizes 28 cultural student groups on campus. One possible way to increase interest among these students is to meet with the presidents of these cultural organizations and convey the benefits which their members would receive from participation in LeaderShape. Additionally, electronic and paper mailings to the rosters of these organizations should yield an increased number of minority applicants. It should be noted that the university is already doing a good job at recruiting a diverse contingent of students for LeaderShape. Thus, the current recruitment

strategies should remain in place, and the additional methods described above should be used to further improve minority recruitment. Similarly, the LeaderShape coordinators might consider offering one to two specialized sessions designed to address the specific needs of these various students. These discussions, which could take the form of break-out sessions at the LeaderShape retreat, would provide further opportunities for personal leadership development among the attendees.

### Learning Outcomes from LeaderShape

As mentioned previously, the LeaderShape program is being used at numerous campuses across the country. However, the learning objectives of this program, as gathered from the national LeaderShape website, are ill defined at best. Furthermore, there are no published independent research studies which seek to identify the learning objectives of LeaderShape. For these reasons, this study was designed to provide insight into what recent graduates of this program are actually learning. After analyzing the data collected from these five recent graduates of the LeaderShape Institute, several themes become apparent. First, students of this retreat report higher levels of self-confidence. Students in campus leadership positions seem to feel that they should exhibit a sense of security and assurance to their followers, and LeaderShape is one way in which students can improve their confidence as leaders. Second, LeaderShape also teaches students to identify their own weaknesses and recognize situations in which they should ask for help. Several participants in this study observe that leaders need to know themselves before they can effectively lead others. More specifically, one common misconception about student leadership is that good leaders do everything themselves. LeaderShape appears to be teaching students how to create a support system through networking with other campus leaders. Similarly, a third outcome of the LeaderShape program is the significance of teamwork and

communication when striving to become a good leader. Several of the specific games and exercises at LeaderShape surfaced repeatedly within this study's data. As recommended above, LeaderShape should expand this aspect of the retreat as students appear to be gathering valuable lessons from these exercises. Finally, although not necessarily a learning objective, attendance at the LeaderShape retreat certainly provides students with new social contacts on campus. Astin (1993) postulates that peer groups are one of the most significant predictors of collegiate success, and LeaderShape is providing students with new positive influences in their lives. Even taking into account the criticisms of the program, students generally believed that LeaderShape is teaching important leadership lessons while at the same time maintaining an enjoyable and interactive environment.

#### Further Opportunities for Study

As described in Chapter 1, the findings in this qualitative study provide a useful framework for future quantitative studies which evaluate LeaderShape on a broader level. For example, future researchers could employ the themes identified in this study in order to conduct wide scale research on the LeaderShape program across the country. Based on the findings of this study, a quantitative study could be created in which pre- and post-tests are administered to all LeaderShape participants. This test might ask students to rank their agreement with numerous statements on a ten point scale. These statements would relate to the following constructs: networking, social responsibility, self-confidence, and level of preparedness. The following statements represent a sample of the items which could be included on this quantitative instrument:

I am a role model to other members of the campus community.

The university provides sufficient opportunities for networking with other students.

The university provides sufficient opportunities for networking with staff and faculty.

I am comfortable asking people I do not know for assistance when planning events.

I am confident in my ability to plan a campus-wide event.

Communication is critical when planning a successful event.

The authors of this quantitative study would then compare participants' responses prior to LeaderShape with their responses following the retreat. The data obtained in a study of this type could then be statistically analyzed in order to provide administrators with greater insight into what students are learning at LeaderShape.

The current qualitative study has created other opportunities for research as well. More specifically, since this study included only one male participant, future studies might concentrate more heavily on men's perspectives of student leadership development and LeaderShape. Additionally, this study could be replicated at other campuses in an effort to determine if students in different geographic areas have different perceptions of the ways in which LeaderShape affects them as students and leaders. Thus, numerous possibilities exist which will provide supplementary data regarding LeaderShape and its outcomes. These future studies will certainly both grant us greater insight into student leadership development as well as provide us with improved developmental opportunities for our students.

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## APPENDIX A: SAMPLE QUESTIONS

These represent a sample of the types of questions that were asked:

### Session 1:

What is your reaction to the word “leader”?

What is a leader?

Are leaders born with the innate talent to lead, or can these talents be acquired?

Are there certain qualities that a leader must have in order to be successful? If so, what are they?

What are some of the common misconceptions about leadership?

How important of a role does leadership play in your life?

Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not?

What is an undergraduate student’s motivation for becoming a leader on campus?

What frustrates you about student leadership?

What are your general perceptions about the LeaderShape program and how it affected you?

### Session 2:

What are some of the specific exercises from LeaderShape that you remember? (either good or bad)

How did LeaderShape change you?

In what ways have you applied the concepts learned at LeaderShape in your life as a leader on campus? What about in your personal life?

Do you feel that LeaderShape made you a better leader? Why or why not?

What aspects of this program could be improved?

What aspects did you feel were essential to the fundamental purpose of LeaderShape?

### Session 3:

Since LeaderShape, have you spent any significant time with anyone who you met through this program? In what ways? Has this helped you become a better leader?

Would you be in favor of holding regular “check-in” sessions with the LeaderShape participants during the academic year following the program?

Are there any topics about LeaderShape which we have not yet addressed that you would like to discuss?

In what ways, if any, do you plan on continuing your development as a student leader?

## APPENDIX B: IRB CONSENT FORM

1. Study Title: Students' perceptions of leadership and the ways in the LeaderShape influences the development of student leaders
2. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.  
  
David Dial XXX-XXX-XXXX  
Becky Ropers-Huilman XXX-XXX-XXXX
3. Purpose of the study: The purpose of this research project is to determine the effectiveness of the Leadershape program in enhancing the leadership abilities of the undergraduate participants.
4. Subject Inclusion: Undergraduate students who have previously participated in the Leadershape program
5. Number of Subjects: 5
6. Study Procedures: The study will be conducted in three separate interview sessions. In the first session, subjects will be asked questions regarding their background in leadership. At this time, subjects will also be asked general questions about their experience at the Leadershape program. In the second interview, subjects will be asked specific questions about exercises and events which occurred at Leadershape. In the final session, subjects will be asked questions regarding the ways in which the lessons taken from Leadershape have influenced their lives as both students and leaders on campus.
7. Benefits: This study may yield valuable, qualitative data regarding the effectiveness of the Leadershape program. The data may be used by Leadershape facilitators to improve the program in the future.
8. Risks: There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study as every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the subjects involved.
9. Right to Refuse: Participation in this study is voluntary, and subjects may choose to withdraw at any time without penalty.
10. Privacy: This study will be anonymous in that the data will not be linked back to the individual subjects. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the subjects involved. Data will be kept confidential unless release is legally compelled.
11. Financial Information: There are no anticipated costs associated with participation in this study.



19. Signature: 'The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact the chairman of the Institutional Review Board at XXX-XXX-XXXX. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers' obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

David Dial attended high school in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he graduated with honors in 1998. He then attended Duke University and completed the requirements for majors in public policy studies and classical studies and a minor in political science. Following his graduation from Duke in the spring of 2002, David enrolled at Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in the fall of 2004. He anticipates the completion of his master's degree in liberal arts in the spring of 2006.