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## A mixed methodological assessment of personal development of undergraduate orientation leaders

Kimberly Dottolo Roberts

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A MIXED METHODOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF  
UNDERGRADUATE ORIENTATION LEADERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Human Resource Education  
and Workforce Development

by

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M.B.A., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2006

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## **DEDICATION**

Looking back on my journey, I never would have imagined the idea of finishing a Ph.D. I give credit to some wonderful people who have helped me along the way, offering positive words of encouragement and enthusiasm. I am fortunate to have the loving support of these individuals who have made this journey enjoyable and one that I will never forget.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Orientation programs, while unique in their own design and implementation across campuses, offer incoming students the opportunity to become acquainted with the institutional environment. A particularly important element of orientation programs is the component of orientation leaders who serve as peer mentors and guides to incoming students. These students fulfill several responsibilities of the institution and develop a lasting rapport with incoming students. Orientation leaders have the opportunity to personally develop and gain valuable skills as a result of working the orientation program.

Kolb's experiential learning model provides a framework that explains an orientation leader's personal development. Kolb's model consists of a spiral of four modes of learning – concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Individuals learn by cycling through each of the four phases. Throughout the summer orientation program, orientation leaders in this study had the opportunity to work seven sessions where they encountered a concrete experience, reflected on those experiences, conceptualized those experiences within group discussions, and actively experimented with new ideas and techniques.

In this study, the researcher found that working the orientation program had a significant impact on the personal development of orientation leaders. Themes that emerged corresponded with Chickering's seven vector model of student development. During times in higher education when budgets are tight and funding is limited, it is important to know the lasting effects that orientation programs can have on the orientation leaders. Therefore, colleges and universities must continue to utilize and understand the role of orientation leaders in orientation programs.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Rationale**

There is no doubt the business of higher education has an important responsibility to perform and provide quality programs and experiences to its students. As Astin and Astin (2000) claimed, “higher education plays an important role in shaping the quality of leadership in modern American society” (p. 1). Pressure to perform comes from students, parents, business leaders, the higher education community, and government officials alike (Eaton, 2001). Colleges and universities are not only responsible for educating each new generation of leaders, but also for setting the curriculum and training individuals to educate others. With the demands of a changing economy, future leaders will not only need to possess new knowledge and skills, but they will also be expected to display a high level of wisdom and maturity (Astin & Astin, 2000).

While it makes sense that each institution forms its own environment that differentiates it from others, there are still some very pertinent goals each tries to accomplish. According to Shavelson and Huang (2003), there are four goals that institutions strive to provide in college education: cognitive, personal, social, and civic. The cognitive aspects include learning skills, reasoning skills to apply knowledge learned, and skills to monitor progress in problem solving and handling new situations. Personal and social aspects include empathy, caring, and self-comprehension. Civic outcomes incorporate the abilities to balance personal and social goals, take initiative, and demonstrate integrity and social responsibility. Unfortunately, in state accountability systems, most assessment is based on the cognitive output measures at the expense of personal, social, and civic aspects. Interestingly, the cognitive outcomes include those “soft skills” of personal, social, and civic goals (Shavelson 2007; Shavelson & Huang, 2003).

With the economy changing, colleges and universities are placed in a position now to adapt their goals to meet the needs from employers of new graduates. To prepare students for the demands of the global marketplace, teachers must encourage students to think, not just memorize, and ask questions, rather than simply accept the status quo. A gap is needed for students to problem solve and compare and contrast what they already know (Clough, 2008; Hillman, 2006). Many business leaders debate whether or not institutions are providing graduates with those personal, social, and civic skills necessary to be an effective team player. Critics argue that higher education has a responsibility to reform because critical thinking, effective communication, problem solving, and leadership will increase substantially in future workplace positions. Employers are not only concerned with the academic basics, but they are also looking for the behavioral skills of applying those basics in a “real-world” setting that are not taught in the traditional classroom setting (Callan & Finney, 2002; Carnevale & Others, 1988; Carnevale & Porro, 1994; “College,” 1997).

Astin and Astin (2000) claimed that little attention has been given to student leadership development in higher education. They believe that students will find it quite difficult to lead if they have never been given the chance to experience effective leadership. If the expectation for the next generation of leaders is to commit to decisions and make changes for the common good, institutions must be engaged in the work of the community, sharing, and demonstrating how to accomplish such goals. Likewise, institutions must be willing to model effective leadership and display good problem-solving skills as an example to their students (Astin & Astin, 2000).

Colleges and universities have a unique opportunity to provide learning experiences through both academics and involvement in curricular activities. These activities allow for

personal growth through group projects that serve the institution and community. One of the ways to serve is through involvement in student organizations. Unfortunately, colleges and universities have devoted little attention to leadership development and continue to focus on the gaining of knowledge. In order to produce future leaders, institutions have “to *empower* students, by helping them develop those special talents and attributes that will enable them to become effective social change agents” (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 2). There has been limited emphasis on the development of quantitative and critical thinking skills. More attention needs to be implemented to address important personal qualities that are crucial for effective leadership. Some of those qualities include self-understanding, listening, honesty, and collaboration. Students are like sponges, and much of what they learn comes from not only what is said, but also what is portrayed in the academic environment (Astin & Astin, 2000).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) pointed out that social and extracurricular involvement influences the cognitive skills and intellectual growth of students. Interactions with peers play an important role in a student’s development in college. Some students seek opportunities to provide mentoring and teaching to younger, less experienced students. These relationships offer individuals the opportunity to engage with others of the same age and to serve in a role that addresses the fulfillment of certain responsibilities. Terrior and Leonard (2007) outlined several characteristics of students who serve in a peer-mentoring role. A student’s willingness to commit necessary time to the role and self-motivation greatly impact personal learning and gratification. Communication, support, and trust, along with enthusiasm and flexibility, are vital to an effective and successful peer-mentoring relationship. Ample evidence exists to support that associating with peers of similar interests is linked to positive outcomes (Astin, 1999; Kram,

1983; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005; McLean, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terrior & Leonard, 2007; Topping, 1996).

Today, most universities offer some type of orientation process to incoming students prior to their first day of class. Although the format and process have evolved over time, the principle purposes of an orientation program have remained consistent. According to Smith and Brackin (1993), the process of orientation is “an intentional set of programs integrating the entering students into a new environment” (p. 36). If you were to think of the college experience as a continuum, recruitment of students would be on one end and graduation would be on the other end. Orientation is part of the continuum that allows students to see what is available to them during their college career. This transition process is not only critical in the adjustment for incoming students, but is also a means of recruiting students to the institution (Posner & Rosenberger, 1997; Smith & Brackin, 1993).

An important feature of these programs is the added value that student leaders can experience by serving as peer orientation leaders to incoming students. Peer support and leadership is shown in many different roles on campuses. Some institutions offer students the opportunity to assist in teaching different first-year courses, while others offer peer tutoring. The main point to these types of experiences is that students assist other students outside of direct classroom contact time. Research studies have concluded that peer interaction, especially when discussing issues related to campus activities, has a tremendous positive impact on learning for all involved (Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The role of the orientation process is not to be underestimated. Research links orientation programs to retention, which makes a lasting and positive impact on a student’s success in college. A vital component to the support of an orientation process comes from student leaders



who serve as peer mentors and advisors. Student orientation leaders introduce incoming students to the ways of the university. They share the academic side along with the extracurricular side and show how to balance the two. Student orientation leaders share personal experiences that are valued by their peers. New students take advice from student leaders on how to schedule classes, what majors are available, and how to use a service on campus. These relationships serve as examples of how successful college students look and act (Fox, Zakely, Morris, & Jundt, 1993).

Astin (1999) emphasized that students who are involved on campus are more likely to continue working on their degree when they are connected in some way to the university. Involvement in the orientation program is a very beneficial way to stay connected on campus. Student leaders gain personal and realistic experience as well as skills to use after graduation.

The role of orientation leaders is to assist students in their transition from high school, another college or university, or the workplace to the higher education environment (Posner & Rosenberger, 1997). The selection of this group of individuals is key to a successful orientation program. Several campuses have a set of guidelines in determining the qualities necessary to be a student orientation leader. There is usually an application process that includes a formal interview along with a group exercise to gauge teamwork capabilities. It is important that students understand the task that is in front of them and the commitment that they are making in accepting the position. Mullendore and Abraham (1993) believed that “clarifying expectations up front can help build a very successful orientation team and prevent some problems from happening” (p. 69). In most cases, former student orientation leaders are asked to assist in the recruitment, selection, and preparation process of orientation leaders along with key departmental staff members that are influential in the orientation programs. Former leaders and staff members can assist by providing insight to an orientation process with which they are very

familiar. Preparation for this experience consists of several hours of training and development from advisors, former leaders, and representatives of departments on campus. Orientation leaders are educated on different scenarios that can arise during the orientation process, including how to handle tough issues and conflicting situations. It is crucial that student leaders receive thorough training and feel confident in handling all situations related to the orientation process. This includes effective communication skills to speak to students and parents alike, answering questions, and directing information to appropriate individuals. It is important for students to understand the services related to the institution, such as academic success centers and career services. Because a single staff member cannot help every student and parent that comes through orientation, it is important to come together as a team and support each other (Mullendore & Abraham, 1993).

Student orientation leaders are the peer mentors that assist students in their transition to college. They are responsible for sharing all information necessary to incoming students and their parents. In many instances, student orientation leaders are the backbone of the orientation program. Well-trained orientation leaders can guarantee the success of a smooth orientation program. The select group of students has an opportunity not only to impact the university by serving as orientation leaders, but also to gain “real world” experience and valuable leadership skills. It is vital to continue research in the area of student growth and personal development because our future leaders are depending on a quality education that encompasses both in and out of the classroom experiences.

While research exists that addresses the impact of the orientation program from the perspective of the participants such as incoming students and parents (Mullendore & Biller, 1993), little research exists on the impact the orientation program has on orientation leaders.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory provides a means to address the impact from the perspective of orientation leaders. Kolb's model is grounded in learning as a process and learning through experience. The cyclical process of learning begins with a concrete experience (leading a two-day orientation session) and then moves to reflective observation (through debriefing sessions after each day of the session). From there, individuals move to abstract conceptualization (verbalize and communicate what was learned and how to apply that in future sessions and occurrences) and the cycle completes with active experimentation (leading the next two-day session). Finishing one cycle begins the start of another (Kolb, 1984). Individuals in this study have the opportunity to experience seven sessions throughout the summer. While each session has its own unique situations, the idea of learning from experiences in each session follows Kolb's experiential learning model and is therefore the framework used for this study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact a summer orientation program has on the personal development of orientation leaders at a research university (very high research activity as classified by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) in the southern United States (Carnegie, 2010).

### **Objectives**

The objective of this study is to determine if a summer orientation program can positively influence the personal development of orientation leaders at a university classified by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as very high research activity in the southern region of the United States, using mixed methods. Objectives include:

1. To describe orientation leaders on selected demographic characteristics including age, gender, college major, father's highest education level, and mother's highest education level.
2. To determine the overall pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire scores of skills development as measured by the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument.
3. To identify themes among orientation leader responses with respect to their experience of the summer orientation program.
4. To identify themes from additional data collection strategies that supplement objective three results.

### **Research Question**

What impact does working the summer orientation program have on the personal development of orientation leaders?

### **Definition of Terms**

1. Freshman Orientation, Advising and Pre-registration (FOAP) – a program that is designed for incoming freshmen who enter in the fall semester. The four main components of this program include special interest sessions to enlighten the individual about university services, testing to earn college credit, meeting with academic advisor to learn about academic curriculum and plan first semester, and class scheduling for first semester ([www.lsu.edu/orientation](http://www.lsu.edu/orientation)).
2. FOAP team – a group of students who serve as orientation leaders (researcher defined).
3. Incoming freshman – a student who has enrolled at a university for the upcoming fall semester for the first time, having never attended any other orientation program ([www.lsu.edu/orientation](http://www.lsu.edu/orientation)).

4. Orientation Leader – an upperclassman who assists in the FOAP program and plays a vital role in the facilitation and adjustment of new students to the university (researcher defined).
5. Orientation Team Leader – an upperclassman who is responsible for the FOAP team and serves as a liaison between orientation leaders and faculty and professional staff members (researcher defined).

### **Significance of Study**

Universities across the nation are beginning to place more and more emphasis on providing leadership training and development of students as leaders. Institutions vary in the types of leadership development programs they offer; some utilize techniques in the classroom, whereas others provide out of the classroom or extracurricular activities (Astin, 2000; Bass, 1990; Kuh et al., 2005). The orientation program is a perfect example of a student development experience for students who are selected as orientation leaders. By offering this program, students have the opportunity to grow and develop personally and are in key positions to influence the recruitment and retention of students to their university.

The opportunity to serve as an orientation leader can be rewarding for both the incoming students and parents, as well as for the leader. The knowledge gained in this study will support the importance of offering out of the classroom experiences for students to develop personally during their college career. Through this study, the researcher hopes to gain a better understanding of the impact an orientation program can have on an orientation leader in their personal development.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Kolb's experiential learning model has become quite popular amongst researchers and practitioners in the field of education. The main emphasis of this model revolves around learning being a process that is grounded in experience (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's work in developing his model draws from the origins of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. The following theorists offered a strong foundation in experiential learning, which forms Kolb's model. The researcher will discuss the importance of each of the theorists and how their models culminate in Kolb's experiential learning model.

#### **Dewey – Experience and Education**

One of Dewey's (1938b) first statements in *Experience and Education* was that there is an "organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 25). You cannot, however, claim that all experience is educative. Any experience that lacks sensitivity and responsiveness can hinder future growth and be misinterpreted as educative. While Dewey believed students do have experiences in education, it is not enough to just have an experience. Experiences must embrace a certain quality and effect. The quality of the experience includes whether or not the aspects of agreeableness and disagreeableness along with an influence for future experience are present. The effect of experience offers engagement and desire for future experiences (Dewey, 1938b).

Dewey believed the goal of learning is for the individual to connect with the environment in an effective manner. Learning is not simply memorizing information. In addition, learning is a cooperative endeavor that involves both the student and the facilitator working together to accomplish the task. Students who are engaged in the process are more likely to have a positive

attitude (Emerson, 1976). Dewey (1938b) stated “an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person in dead places in the future” (p. 35).

With the changing environment of higher education now offering opportunities for people of all generations and backgrounds to attend, the need for education to connect to practicality is more evident than ever. Part of this connection is taking learning to a level that requires relevance and application for future experiences outside of the classroom. Students want to know how what they are learning can help them in the future. Education needs to embrace activities and experiences that address the relevance of what is being learned (Kolb, 1984).

An aspect of education important to Dewey was the idea of individual development and growth. Educators should not only focus on the intellectual development of students, but also the social skills, those including working with people and being an effective group member (Dewey, 1938b; Emerson, 1976). Educators also have a responsibility, according to Dewey (1938a), to “not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth” (p. 35).

Dewey claimed the link between education and work is missing because career expectations for graduates and employers are not being met. Students are not seeing the real aspects of the career choice they have chosen while in college, and employers feel their employees are not being fully prepared for the job (Clough, 2008; “College,” 1997). The idea of experiential learning offers a method for meeting this gap (Kolb, 1984).

When looking at the learning experience, Dewey outlined five different steps that must be created. First, the learner has to have a concrete experience that is continuous. Second, the learner must be faced with a problem that serves as a stimulus needing resolution. Third, the learner has to have the knowledge and make the observations necessary to solve the problem. Fourth, the learner has to be responsible in developing and selecting the appropriate solution. Fifth, the learner has to be given the opportunity to test this solution and discover its meaning personally. Through these steps, the learner is able to have a well-rounded experience that he or she can make decisions upon and test. The learner is then an active participant in the learning process (Dewey, 1938b, Emerson, 1976).

Kolb explained Dewey's model as a time of action and reflection. Individuals start with an experience that sparks impulse. Observation and judgment must intervene before action can be given, and action leads to purpose. This cycle represents how an individual moves from impulse to active purpose (1984).

Interest in incorporating experiential learning methods in higher education is a growing trend that was initiated by Dewey. The struggle places a challenge on the traditional approach to education. With our changing educational environment, it is necessary to utilize the experiences that students have learned from outside of the classroom. This empowers students to use their practical ideas with ideas discussed in the classroom. Dewey's continual process linking education, work, and personal development depicted this belief (Kolb, 1984).

### **Lewin – Experiential Learning**

Lewin's model is very similar to the model of Dewey, whose experiential learning philosophy derived from his research on group dynamics. Lewin's work in training and organizational development is still used today as a method for change intervention. This



discovery came full circle when Lewin and his colleagues researched a new approach to leadership and group-dynamics training. The study involved a two-week training program where observations were made with individuals of the Connecticut State Interracial Commission. Individuals participated in group discussions and decision making with staff members, and all were treated as peers. Lewin and his colleagues would meet after the meetings, without the participants, to discuss observations for the day. It wasn't until a few participants asked to sit in on the meetings that Lewin's discovery was made. In that meeting, an observer noted some behaviors of a participant who happened to be one of the few that sat in the meeting. The participant chimed into the conversation to share her interpretation of the behavior, and their active dialogue sparked interest for other participants to join in the evening meetings. These sessions began to turn into daily learning experiences that incorporated observed behavioral events with differences in interpretation. It was in these observations that Lewin realized the importance of learning through discussions of concrete experiences and abstract concepts (Kolb, 1984).

Lewin's work eventually led to important concepts of experiential learning. First, subjective experience is emphasized as a value in learning. At the time of Lewin's work, this belief contrasted with theory linking learning to a logical process of objectivity. Instead, the value of human feelings and thoughts are valued and essential to the experiential learning atmosphere. The second concept involves the importance of simulated situations that are designed to give individuals the opportunity to create personal experiences that promote inquiry and understanding (Kolb, 1984).

The Lewinian experiential learning model, like Kolb's, is a four-stage cycle that begins with a concrete experience. From there, observations and reflections are noted and analyzed.

The final stage involves the conclusions to test implications learned in new situations.

According to Lewin, the concrete experience and the feedback process are two very important phases to this cycle. Without feedback, organizations may focus too heavily on actions and decisions without giving light to crucial feedback that is utilized in decision making (Kolb, 1984).

### **Piaget – Learning and Cognitive Development**

The final dimension of Kolb's experiential learning origins lies with Piaget, whose focus was on cognitive-development processes. Piaget believed intelligence develops from experience and that the process of growth involves learning through stages. Unlike Kolb's continuous cycle of experiential learning, Piaget developed his cycle as a means to explain growth from infants through teenagers. He believed an individual develops through these stages over time. The cycle begins with concrete experience, such as feeling and touching, and moves to a reflective stage where actions are converted to images. From there, individuals then begin to develop inductive reasoning where the reliance on concepts and theories matters more than concrete observations. The final stage revolves around learning as convergent because the individual is able to use the previous stages of concrete experience, reflection, and abstract conceptualization to test beliefs and ideas. Although Piaget's theory did not extend into the realm of the adult learning process, his cycle can be similarly related to Kolb's experiential learning model (Kolb, 1984).

### **Kolb – Experiential Learning Propositions**

The preceding authors form the basis for Kolb's experiential learning model. Taken together, these three models can be summed into the following propositions.

- Learning is a process, not in terms of outcomes.
- Learning is continuous and grounded in experience.
- Learning requires the resolution of conflicts.
- Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
- Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment.
- Learning is the process of creating knowledge.

The idea of learning as a process, not in terms of outcomes, goes against traditional educational beliefs. If ideas were seen as undeniable and fixed, regurgitating information would be a valid measure to gauge learning. The difference here is that ideas are not fixed and do change based on experience, so learning cannot be solely based on outcomes, but must incorporate the idea of a process (Kolb, 1984). Dewey (1981) claimed “learning... is a process, yielding its rewards enroute and from time to time consummating in an insight, a breakthrough, or even a mastery of a discipline or an area of study” (p. 443). The focus is to stimulate engagement in the learning process (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Dewey (1981) continued to vouch that learning is continuous and grounded in experience. Kolb and Kolb (2005) claimed that all learning is relearning. Experiences include both active and passive elements, and to learn from experience is to make a connection between what is trying on the active side and what is undergoing on the passive side. Miettinen (2000) professed that Dewey’s belief on experience includes “objective forms of interaction between humans and the environment...” (p. 70). An experience leads to an action, and that action results in certain consequences. Thinking happens when we make the connection between what is done and its consequences. Previous experiences are then used to assist us in future decisions. Therefore, the cycle continues again and again (Dewey, 1981).

Part of adapting to the world is understanding that conflicts exist and individuals learn through the resolutions of these conflicts. Kolb (1984, p. 30) described learning as a “tension- and conflict-filled process” where knowledge and skills are gained through confrontation. When faced with an experience, we are challenged to make sense of the concrete versus abstract and the active versus reflective dimensions. While it can be difficult to achieve, a learner must interact with each of the four phases in order to be effective. To achieve this success, learners must “involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias to new experiences,” “be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives,” “create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories,” and “use these theories to make decisions and solve problems” (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). The beliefs of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget supported this idea. Dewey’s model combined the conflict of impulse to act with the desire in direction that leads to the purposeful action. Lewin’s study with group dynamics brought about the conflict between concrete experience and abstract conceptualization. Piaget’s cognitive development theory encompassed the transaction between accommodating structures to explain new experiences and assimilating new experiences to an existing framework (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

The final three propositions seem almost evident. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Learning goes beyond the walls of a classroom. It is not merely grasping concepts in a class to pass a test. Learning is a holistic process that can be transferred across all aspects of life. “Not just the result of cognition, learning involves the integrated functioning of the total person – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194). When learning is viewed as a holistic process, it bridges the gap between life experiences and learning, depicting learning as a lifelong process. Additionally, learning involves transactions between the person and the environment. All three models discussed

earlier began with a concrete experience where the individual interacts with the environment. There has to be a starting point that engages the learner and a balance that connects new experiences to existing concepts and existing concepts to new experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Finally, learning is the process of creating knowledge, which is formed by both social and personal experiences. Kolb (1984) claimed “knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it” (p. 41). This constructivist view involves knowledge that is both created and recreated (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

### **Kolb - Experiential Learning Model**

Kolb’s experiential learning model is a four-stage cycle involving four adaptive modes – concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In order for learning to be educational, the learner must engage in an experience through all phases of the model. When thinking about the word “experience,” we cannot assume that an experience is anything that happens to us. In Dewey’s belief, not all experience is educative. Only those experiences that we truly engage in and reflect on can reap positive benefits for the future. According to Kreber (2001), Kolb should have perhaps described experiential learning using the term “events,” rather than “experiences.” Learning begins with “events” and is later transformed into “experiences” once we conclude through the cycle. Simply having an experience does not constitute experiential learning (Kreber, 2001). Kolb’s experiential learning model begins with a concrete experience (CE). This can include clinical, laboratories, role playing, game simulation or structured exercises. These activities are action oriented where individuals learn by doing. Through the concrete experience, individuals are able to generate their own ideas about the situation. The second step, reflective observation (RO), involves observing and reflecting on what happened during the experience. This can be

shared through discussions, debriefings, or written logs. In this stage, the learner is able to communicate what they recognized during the situation in the first stage. This new information includes feelings, reactions, and observations from the perception of the learner. The learner then enters the abstract conceptualization (AC) stage. In this stage, the individual thinks of principles, concepts, and generalizations that link the process from the second step.

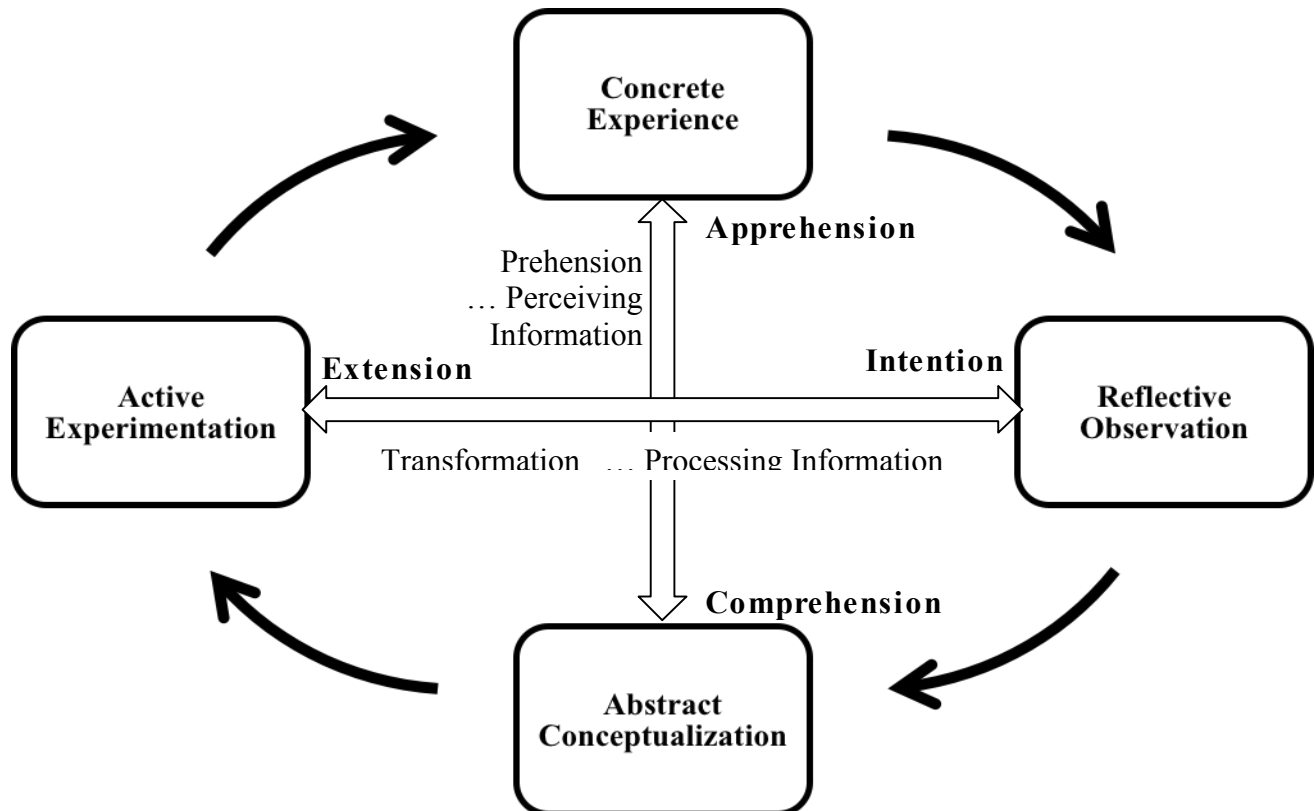


Figure 1: Roberts' Depiction of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

This can occur through group discussions where individuals are asked to process their observations, feelings, and reactions together to make a more generalized statement. This stage is particularly important because individuals are able to test their own feelings and reactions to those of others that experienced the same situation. The more open everyone in the group is to sharing, the more learning can be achieved. The final stage in Kolb's experiential learning model is active experimentation (AE). This application stage allows individuals to test their new

ideas and thoughts in another situation that was similar to the first concrete experience. This fourth stage also begins the start of a new cycle. Individuals are able to achieve this step when they are faced with a new experience. In this stage, the individual is responsible for his or her own learning (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

This cycle starts over every time the learner has a new experience. Individuals are faced with situations on a daily basis, and they continuously test concepts and observations, making changes when they feel necessary. Gardner and Korth (1997) believed the cycle “implies that experience is the springboard for new learning” (p. 48).

Kolb’s two main dimensions in his model relate to the differences in how we learn, first grasping experience and then transforming experience. Prehension relates to how an individual perceives or grasps an event, either through apprehension or comprehension. The former, what we see, hear, and feel represents the concrete experience, and the latter, how we rely on conceptual interpretation, represents the abstract conceptualization. During the concrete experience stage, the individual must be willing to release their reflective side and take in the entire experience; conversely, the individual must be willing to enter in a mental set and verbalize their situation to experience a positive connection with abstract concepts. We think of the prehension dimension as a vertical continuum that flows from concrete experience to abstract conceptualization. Opposed to the prehension dimension is the transformation dimension on the horizontal axis, which explains how an individual learns from an event or transforms knowledge. This dimension flows horizontally from reflective observation to active experimentation. Knowledge transformation can take place through intention (via reflective observation) or extension (via active experimentation). Kolb believed each mode, apprehension, comprehension, intention and extension, is independent. Apprehension and comprehension are independent

modes of grasping knowledge along the vertical dimension and intention and extension are independent modes of transforming experience along the horizontal dimension (Abdulwahed & Nagy, 2009; Emerson, 1976; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Learning is complete when the individual addresses both of the dimensions and flows through all four phases of the cycle. In order to achieve optimal learning and growth, the learner must experience all stages equally. However, this seldom happens because of diverse backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses (Kolb, 1984).

### **Kolb – Experiential Learning in Practice**

Despite a plethora of research on experiential learning as a whole, very few studies have addressed utilizing Kolb's experiential learning model in higher education. Since the term "experiential learning" has a wide variety of definitions, it would be unjust to include such studies that loosely use the term "experiential learning" without the foundation from Kolb in this review of literature.

Most studies inspired by Kolb's model involved teaching methodologies or service learning activities that have been implemented through components and benefits added to a classroom assignment or course design. Because Kolb's experiential learning theory revolves around a holistic perspective of learning, it is no surprise that the theory transfers to multiple disciplines (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). These studies cover a variety of disciplines, including science labs (Abdulwahed & Nagy 2009), nursing (Lisko & O'Dell, 2010), geography (Healey & Jenkins, 2000), film production (de Jong, 2006), religious studies (Carlson, 1998), communication (Stokes-Eley, 2007), human resource development (Gardner & Korth, 1997) and research methods (Machtmes et al., 2009).



Experiences from these studies have the opportunity to impact students in various ways. Some students were provided practical experiences that can be transferred to the workplace (Gardner & Korth, 1997; Machtmes et al., 2009). Some studies claimed students have gained self-confidence (Carlson, 1998; Kaul & Pratt, 2010), while others asserted students gained a new understanding and appreciation for a field in their academic area (Abdulwahed & Nagy 2009; Carlson, 1998; de Jong, 2006). Some students were enlightened with new experiences and have made decisions to change their minors or majors (Carlson, 1998). Still others affirmed growth in certain skills, such as public speaking (Stokes-Eley, 2007), empowerment (de Jong, 2006), and critical thinking (Lisko & O'Dell, 2010). Learning through Kolb's experiential learning model has reaped tremendous benefits for students, and the need to continue utilizing this style of learning must persist in education.

Unfortunately, limited research exists that addresses Kolb's model to a group of students who serve in a role similar to the participants in the researcher's study. Most studies are connected to a course and involve class credit, whereas orientation leaders are student volunteers who do not receive college credit for their involvement in the orientation program. Similarly, studies mentioned cover an entire semester of implementation. The participants in this study are involved in an intense, seven-week program that consumes most if not all of their time. Individuals are provided the opportunity for optimal growth and development in learning through experience.

### **Student Development and Experience**

The idea of student development and developmental theories has generated several discussions over the decades. Developmental theories involve the "nature, structure, and processes of individuals human growth" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 18). One area of

student developmental theory lies with psychosocial theories. These theories foster individual development that is established through a series of developmental tasks. Individuals progress and change throughout their life from encountering both social and environmental influences. Individuals also develop with age. Psychosocial theories, specifically Chickering's seven vector model, deal with the overall development of individuals during their college years (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Chickering and Reisser's model presented seven vectors of student development. The term "vector" is utilized because it defines both direction and magnitude. Chickering believed "development involves differentiation and integration as students encounter increasing complexity in ideas, values, and other people and struggle to reconcile these new positions with their own ideas, values, and beliefs" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 21). Differentiation results in more complex individuals and integration must accompany differentiation. Ultimately, the result of differentiation and integration "makes participants different from who they were before and different from each other" (Chickering, 2000, p. 24). The seven vectors include (1) achieving competence, (2) managing emotions, (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (5) establishing identity, (6) developing purpose, and (7) developing integrity. Each vector varies from student to student, and not all students experience every vector. Similarly, not all students encounter the same degrees of each vector. Hood (1982) concluded that not all college students experience each of the vectors and that a large majority of students may not encounter this growth until after they graduate from college.

The entire educational environment shapes an individual's development, including classroom instructional strategies, relationships with peers, staff and faculty, and on and off

campus experiences (Chickering, n.d.). Chickering (2000) stated:

. . . the purpose of education is to take diverse persons and help each become more clear about his or her own goals and underlying values. Education helps individuals develop increasingly complex perceptions, concepts, competencies, perspectives, and ways of knowing and being to enable them to achieve their goals and to live their lives. (p. 24)

The spiral through Chickering and Reisser's vectors presents a way to understand individual development, specifically with students through their college years.

The first major area of student development in college is achieving competence. The three areas of competence include intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal relations. Intellectual competence, without a doubt, is most prevalent in the goals and objectives of the college environment (Chickering, 1967). Hood (1982) believed that students may not develop a sense of competence while in class and that it is "often on summer or part-time jobs that they find that they can succeed, often far easier than they expected" (p. 8).

College years are not the time to neglect emotions, but to embrace them and learn how to work with them. The first task along the managing emotions vector is to become aware of emotions. Once one recognizes emotions and how they can be utilized, the second task is to use that knowledge as a source of information for actions and decision making. Individuals have to learn how to deal with their emotions, those that are good and bad, and how to balance self-control and self-expression (Chickering, 1969).

Chickering (n.d.) stated that autonomy involves emotional independence, instrumental independence, and recognition of interdependence. The first part of autonomy takes place when individuals become free of the approval and opinions of others and typically occurs with the disengagement from parents or guardians. Instrumental independence implies that individuals

have learned how to cope with problems without seeking help and can organize their own thoughts and beliefs. Recognition of interdependence occurs when individuals understand the balance that exists between being independent and belonging. Moving through autonomy toward interdependence is influenced by opportunities to fulfill certain responsibilities within the college community.

Developing mature interpersonal relationships happens when individuals have grasped the idea of being tolerant of others, not in the sense of “putting up” with others, but by “increasing capacity to respond to persons in their own right rather than with particular conventions or stereotypes” (Chickering, 1967, p. 3). This vector affirms that “students’ interactions with peers provide powerful learning experiences and help shape the emerging sense of self” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 22).

Establishing identity is dependent on the previous vectors of competence, emotions, and autonomy. Chickering (1969) stated that individuals high on this vector know the type of person they want to be and have a sense of balance and perspective. Developing identity involves seeing the whole in things. These individuals understand their strengths and weaknesses and are content with issues and concerns about school, work, and future careers. As cited in Chickering (1969), the three components that foster identity development are relative freedom from pressure, change in direct experience and roles, and meaningful achievement.

During the pivotal years of a student’s college career, several questions emerge about purpose. Not only “Who am I?” but also “Who am I going to be?” are typical questions asked of individuals who seek direction and purpose. An individual’s growth in developing plans and establishing goals and aspirations surface through this vector (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Developing integrity is closely related to two previous vectors of identity and purpose. Integrity deals with the values and beliefs that shape an individual. “Movement toward integrity... involves three sequential, but overlapping, stages: (1) humanizing values, (2) personalizing values, and (3) developing congruence” (p. 127). Individuals must be able to make sense of why they believe certain things. Certain rules existed as children that were unquestioned, but humanizing values pushes individuals to make their own sense of rules and the purposes they are meant to serve. Personalizing values occurs when individuals make personal sense of their values, all while respecting the viewpoints of others. Developing congruence connects what is realized and what is demonstrated in behavior. Chickering (1969) stated:

When fully realized, integrity is reflected in consistency of belief and behavior, of word and deed. Internal argument is minimal. Once the implications of a situation are understood and once the consequences of alternative actions seem clear, the response is highly determined. It is made with conviction, without debate or equivocation. (p. 142)

Orientation leaders are challenged to grow and develop within the seven vectors throughout the orientation program and experience. Orientation programs vary greatly throughout colleges and universities, but all strive to assist incoming students in their adjustment to the institutional environment. Orientation programs include activities and events led by orientation leaders and/or staff members that enable incoming students to understand expectations of the institutions. Participation by orientation leaders, faculty, and staff forms an incoming student’s connection with the institution (Smith & Brackin, 1993). The trend of orientation programs over the past decades has veered away from the idea of orientation being a framework of fun and games. The focus of orientation is more serious and encompasses an introduction of the academic environment and community to parents and students. Some

institutions are viewing orientation programs as an important retention activity (Strumpf & Sharer, 1993). Because of the significance of orientation programs, orientation leaders are held at high standards to maintain the professional and personal responsibilities and relationships that are set by the administrative staff of the institution.

### **Orientation Programs**

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) exists to “promote the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2008). The National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) was formed in 1976 to assist student affairs professionals in the orientation, retention, and transition of students. Orientation programs are not a new concept in the realm of higher education. The history of orientation programs dates back to almost the start of higher education. Harvard was the first institution to formally introduce an orientation program where older students assisted new students into their transition to the college environment. While some techniques used back then would not be appropriate in today’s time, the idea of developing a support system that would ease the transition to college life was a priority (Strumpf & Sharer, 1993).

According to CAS standards, orientation programs must assist students and parents in “understanding the nature and purpose of the institution, their membership in the academic community, and their relationship to the intellectual, cultural, and social climate of the institution” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2008). NODA outlines specific goals and standards that must be upheld in all orientation programs. Orientation programs are dependent on the support and assistance from all members of the institution. In particular, the success of an orientation program is dependent on leaders who “empower

professional, support, and student staff to accept leadership opportunities” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2005). Orientation programs require trained individuals who are qualified to undertake the responsibilities of the program. Individuals must be provided with “appropriate professional development opportunities to improve leadership ability, competence, and skills” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2005). The following standards must be met according to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2005),

Student employees and volunteers must be carefully selected, trained, supervised, and evaluated. They must be educated on how and when to refer those in need of additional assistance to qualified staff members and must have access to a supervisor for assistance in making these judgments. Student employees and volunteers must be provided clear and precise job descriptions, pre-service training based on assessed needs, and continuing staff development. Student staff must be informed as to the limits of their authority, the expectation for appropriate role modeling, and their potential influence on new students.

### **Orientation Leaders**

NODA has provided assistance to student affairs professionals for over 40 years. According to Williams and Rode (2007), in the last 30 years very little research has been discussed about student development within NODA’s annual conferences. One would think that with the emphasis of the holistic development of students, there would exist research and studies addressing student development and its importance in the college environment. Williams and Rode (2007) conducted a content analysis on NODA conference programs of the last 30 years. While they did not have access to every conference, the earliest review was from 1979, and a total number of 1,279 sessions were reviewed. Of these, only 20 sessions (1.6%) dealt with

“Student Development,” which included topics on “student and leadership involvement, decision-making and time-management skills, involvement of orientation leaders (both during and after orientation programs) as a vehicle for student development, developing responsible citizens from college student, and graduate internships” (Williams & Rode, 2007, p. 23).

Research on orientation leaders is sparse. Although the role of orientation leaders is quite significant in the orientation program, minimal research exists about these students. Going through publications released from NODA, very few additional sources were found addressing orientation leaders and their personal development.

Some professionals express witnessing personal development changes with orientation leaders throughout the orientation program. Mann (1998) claimed orientation leaders take part in this program by exposing information about the university in a fun and creative way. She believed it is important to utilize upperclassmen that have an “instant rapport and credibility” (p. 18) with the students. “Upper-class students are also effective in setting expectations for the new students – in conveying the differences between high school and college in the areas of academics, studying, and assuming responsibility for one’s action, and in passing on school traditions” (Mann, 1998, p. 18). An effective orientation leader staff is the result of good recruiting, selection, training, and supervision. These leaders must be taught how to lead small group discussions, work through difficult or conflicting situations and separate personal opinion from university facts. Mann (1998) believed that “orientation leaders should have personal growth and leadership development experiences as a result of serving in the position” (p. 18). In her experience working with these students, Mann (1998) stated the most impressive growth indicated to her was the comfort in speaking to large groups, understanding of university functions, networking with administrative staff, leadership skills, and service to the university.



Mann (1998) claimed the positive development she has seen with orientation leaders far surpasses any other student development work. Orientation leaders have the potential and opportunity to grow through this experience.

Bell, Holmes, and Williams (2010) assessed outdoor orientation programs held across the United States and found that orientation leaders played an important role in the orientation program. Of the 164 institutions that utilize an outdoor orientation program, roughly 88% of the program leaders are students. On average, these program leaders undergo 111 hours of training, and 79% of programs do not provide college credit for participation. Unfortunately, the impact of the orientation leadership training on college students is unknown, but the authors believed the exposure of such training can be beneficial during a time when students are contemplating career aspirations (Bell et al., 2010).

Some institutions utilize the knowledge from previous orientation leaders for program evaluation. Kent State, when evaluating their orientation program, realized the importance of orientation leaders and sought to make changes to their orientation staffing process. McKenzie (2002) realized the difficulties in recruiting students to these positions and wanted to make improvements. Kent State assembled a small focus group of student leaders to address these concerns (2002). At the time of publication, McKenzie stated the university had not yet implemented the changes, but did feel that the student input was beneficial to the program. Because of their direct connection to the program, orientation leaders can provide valuable information for future orientation programs.

Upperclassmen are utilized in various ways throughout an orientation program. Branch, Taylor and Douglas (2003) discussed the Sophomore Mentor Program called New Student Seminar (NSS) at Salve Regina University. The program offers second-year students an

opportunity to increase involvement and investment in the institution by serving in the role of mentor. Additionally, first-year students were exposed to seminars where they could develop positive relationships with a peer mentor, faculty member, and professional staff member. The program consisted of seminars throughout the fall semester and three follow-up sessions in the spring semester. This study looked to determine the impact, if any, participation in the program had on the sophomore mentors. The role of the sophomore mentor was to “serve as a resource to freshman enrolled in the NSS and to assist in their transition to college” (p. 20). The main source of data gathered was through semi-structured focus groups with sophomores, freshmen, staff, and faculty. Two themes emerged from the sophomore mentors: increased development in intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and disappointment and frustration when expectations were not met (Branch et al., 2003). While the role of sophomore mentors is similar to the role of participants in the researcher’s study, there are distinct differences with the structure, length, time commitment, and responsibility of mentors in comparison to the NSS program.

### **Summary**

This review of literature discusses the theoretical framework of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory and demonstrates limited research on this theory as it applies to orientation leaders. Additional literature is provided discussing Chickering’s seven vector model as it relates to development of college students. Furthermore, research about orientation leaders, as a whole, is limited. Administrators spend several hours preparing for summer orientation programs, and student leaders play a vital role in the process. However, the researcher is unsure of what student impact exists from this experience. It is through this study that the researcher hopes to gain a better understanding of the impact a summer orientation program can have on orientation leaders.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact a summer orientation program has on the personal development of orientation leaders at a research university (very high research activity as classified by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) in the southern United States (Carnegie, 2010). Objectives include:

1. To describe orientation leaders on selected demographic characteristics including age, gender, college major, father's highest education level, and mother's highest education level.
2. To determine the overall pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire scores of skills development as measured by the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument.
3. To identify themes among orientation leader responses with respect to their experience of the summer orientation program.
4. To identify themes from additional data collection strategies that supplement objective three results.

#### **Research Design**

This research study follows a mixed methods design, defined as a blended approach of quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, and language in a single study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). "The goal of mixed methods research is not to replace either of these approaches but rather draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across studies" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 13-14). In other words, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods offers a more complete analysis of the research question (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

In quantitative research, a researcher uses numerical data and focuses on deductive thinking. The researcher relies on measurement tools, such as questionnaires and scales. The research results are relatively independent of the researcher, and cause-and-effect relationships can be assessed. The quantitative component in research focuses on an outcomes-based evaluation (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

On the opposite side of the continuum, qualitative research is useful for studying a limited number of cases in-depth and describing complex phenomena. In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and seeks to understand human and social behaviors within a particular setting (Ary et al., 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

In mixed methods designs, quantitative and qualitative research work side by side at the same level. Although Gorard (2010) saw mixed methods approaches as “complex, difficult, and innovative” (p. 238) because of the combination of paradigms, a stronger conclusion can be made based on the results (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Words can add meaning to numbers, and numbers can add meaning to words. A wider range of research questions can be utilized in mixed methods because the researcher is not restricted to a single method (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

This study uses the sequential transformative mixed method design, denoted as QUAL → quan (Morse, 2010), in which data collected in one phase dictates data collected in a subsequent phase (Ary et al., 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Sequential transformative designs have two distinct data phases. Priority can be given to either quantitative or qualitative data, and the results utilize the integration of both methods together.

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) believed that qualitative and quantitative components cannot always be determined before the study starts. Sometimes, one component becomes more important in understanding the phenomenon than the other component. In this study, the qualitative component takes priority over the quantitative component. Transformative designs include a conceptual framework, and their purpose is to utilize the methods that will best serve the perspective of the researcher (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003). The use of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory guides the researcher in this study. Additionally, Chickering's seven vector model of student development corresponds to emergent themes of the data. Creswell et al. (2003) claimed sequential transformative designs aim to better understand the change in the phenomenon being studied.

Due to the nature of sequential mixed designs, the sample for the qualitative component in the study was purposeful and based on the results from the quantitative instrument results. Patton (1990) said, "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth" (p. 169). Using information-rich cases allows the researcher to gather more complete answers to the research questions (Patton, 1990).

Multiple data collection strategies were utilized throughout this study, including questionnaires, nonparticipant observations, interviews, and focus groups. Research studies benefit from a mixed approach that includes different data collection strategies. "The emergence of *data triangulation* techniques highlighted the practicality and power of combining multiple data sources, which blur the boundaries between traditional QUAL and QUAN data collection strategies" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 205).

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) provided a way to visually represent a mixed methods study. The dual focal point is a graphical representation of the research process and consists of

two triangles, one pointing down and the other pointing up. The center point where the triangles meet represents the research question. Graphically speaking, the top triangle symbolizes the funnel of information from a broad spectrum to a very specific research question or questions. The bottom triangle represents the expansion of information on the research question and includes the phases of the study. The dual focal point is the research question and the entire study – what is known prior to (depicted in the top triangle) and what emerges from the study (depicted in the bottom triangle) – flows through the research question or questions. This graphical illustration allows the researcher to stay focused on the research question or questions.

In the first phase of the study, quantitative, numeric data was gathered from an instrument designed by the researcher. The instrument, a unipolar questionnaire, consisted of 48 items in Likert-type scale format that addressed personal development. The rating scale for responses used the following Likert-type scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Agree, 4 – Strongly Agree. The researcher also gathered demographic information, including gender, classification (sophomore, junior, senior), age, college major, highest education level completed by father, and highest education level completed by mother. The quantitative component was distributed as a pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire to every participant in the study. The goal of the first phase was to identify those individuals whose total score in pre and post-questionnaire resulted in the most and the least difference.

Eleven individuals were selected for interviews based on the quantitative results. In the second phase, a qualitative approach was used to collect data through observations during the summer program and individual interviews immediately following the end of the program. Following the analysis of phase two, additional follow-up focused interviews took place

### REASONS FOR DOING RESEARCH

- University emphasis on preparation of student leaders
- Importance of experiential learning
- Little research on student orientation leaders

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Overall, the purpose of this study is to determine the impact a summer orientation program had on student orientation leaders. Objectives include:

1. To describe orientation leaders on selected demographic characteristics including gender, age, college major, father's highest education level completed, and mother's highest education level completed.
2. To determine the overall pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire scores of skill development as measured by the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument.
3. To identify themes among orientation leader responses with respect to their experience of the summer orientation program.
4. To identify themes from additional data collection strategies that supplement objective three results.

Understand the impact a summer orientation program had on student orientation leaders.

METHODS – QUAL → quan

Sequential Transformative Mixed Methods Design

Phase 1 involves the collection and analysis of quantitative data. A pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire were administered to all orientation leaders prior to and at the end of the summer experience. Differences in total scores on the instrument were used to determine participants in phase 2.

Phase 2 involves the collection of qualitative data. All debriefing sessions (held after day 1 and day 2 of each session) were observed and recorded. One-on-one interviews (in-person or telephone) were conducted, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for evaluation. These interviews took place within seven days of the end of the program.

Following the analysis of Phase 2, Phase 3 involves the collection of additional qualitative data. Small focus groups, separated by gender, were conducted and recorded for further understanding of the summer experience.

Results in all phases will be analyzed for meta-inference in addressing the research question and objectives of the study.

Figure 2: Dual Focal Point in the Research Process (Adapted from Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009)

approximately four months after the program ended to evaluate and provide a more in-depth analysis of the impact the program had on the participants after returning to an environment outside of the summer orientation program. Often times, a researcher will ask follow-up questions “to get more depth and understanding about an idea, a concept, a theme, an event, or an issue suggested by the interviewee” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 173) that may speak to research questions. Focus groups were split by gender. There was one focus group of three males and two separate focus groups of females (one group with five females and the other with three females). Determination of focus groups was based on availability of participants. Results from all data collection strategies were analyzed for meta-inference in addressing the research question and objectives of the study.

### **Strengths and Limitations of Sequential Transformative Mixed Methods Designs**

Johnston and Onwuegbuzie (2004) provided several strengths and weaknesses of a mixed method design.

Strengths include:

- A researcher can use strengths of an additional method to overcome weaknesses in another method by using both in a research study.
- Quantitative techniques can add meaning to qualitative research and qualitative techniques can add meaning to quantitative research.
- Quantitative and qualitative research can be blended together to produce a more complete conclusion (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Weaknesses include:

- The researcher has to learn both methods in order to mix them appropriately.
- This method may be more expensive and is more time consuming.



- Quantitative results may not show significant differences.

Creswell et al. (2003) mentioned there is little research on the sequential transformative mixed methods design. Therefore, little guidance exists on how to utilize the conceptual framework in guiding the methods. This can affect researchers who use this approach because transferring from phase one data collection to phase two data collection is uncertain.

Another weakness in this design is response-shift bias. Howard (1980) explained response-shift bias as a contamination of self-report instruments when subjects change the scale of measurement in which they rate themselves. For example, in most studies, as in the researcher's study, an objective is to determine a participant's awareness of particular concepts and/or skills. Since the participant may not have been exposed to the concept at the time of pre-testing, his or her self-perception at that time may be skewed. Once the participant encounters the experience, his or her self-perception may change. This means pre-testing and post-testing scores may or may not relate to the same scales. Therefore, the difference in scores cannot adequately reflect a change in understanding from the experience (Howard, 1980). Being aware of these effects in this study, the researcher treated the quantitative component as a support to the qualitative component. In addition, triangulation was utilized as a way for "improving the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305).

### **Protection of Subjects**

Prior to the study, the researcher received approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at Louisiana State University (#E5107). Before the first instrument was administered on May 30, 2010, participants were informed that the study was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any point. Additionally, all information and the identity of the participants were

kept confidential. All information, including original questionnaires, audiotapes, and videotapes, was locked in a desk drawer by the researcher. All information is to be destroyed three years from the date of the IRB approval form.

### **Researcher Lens**

The researcher lens used for this study comes from the perspective of an educator. I have experience working with students both at high school and college levels. My undergraduate degree was in secondary education, and I spent several hours teaching and interacting with students at local high schools during my college career. In the higher education environment, I am involved with students in a variety of roles. My professional position responsibilities include supervising and training student employees. I am involved in several service opportunities throughout the year. Some of these opportunities include working with student organizations, volunteering assistance in departmental programs, and participating in university events. I serve as a mentor every summer for an incoming student program and have conducted several group interviews for student organizations. I also teach non-credit classes at the university, and the majority of classes consist of traditional college-age students.

As a full-time professional with several years of experience working with the group of students who serve as orientation leaders, I feel very qualified to conduct this research study. My position does not supervise the students participating in this study, but I spend several hours interacting with them throughout the year. Although I am heavily involved with the orientation program, my observation of the process comes from an outsider's view. My lens from this perspective actually led to my interest in this research area.

I am involved in several aspects of the selection process for the orientation program. I have served as a committee member in orientation leader interviews and orientation team leader

interviews. Every summer before the orientation sessions begin I lead a training session about my department to the orientation leaders. During this time, I have the chance to interact and develop relationships with the orientation leaders. Throughout the summer, I observe and witness their roles, but only from a professional standpoint. Because of this, I don't see what happens with issues, situations, and meetings held outside of the normal business hours. At the end of the summer, I have the opportunity to interact again with the orientation leaders for their summer banquet. The interesting aspect that sparked my attention was the observation that there existed a change in the orientation leaders at the summer banquet. In the initial training at the beginning of the summer, the students appeared like "a deer in headlights" (i.e. scared, uncertain, questioning, and anxious). At the end of the summer, they looked and acted completely different, both individually and as a team (i.e. comfortable, poised, and mature). With that observation, I became intrigued to want to learn more about the process and how these changes occurred in the orientation leaders. I wanted to see what happened from the summer experience that made this transformation. I have the privilege to maintain a wonderful relationship with the advisor of the orientation leaders. The support from the advisor as well as the orientation leaders was incredible throughout the summer.

The first phase of the study involves analyzing quantitative data. This data presents a way to keep the researcher's perspective unbiased because data is collected and analyzed using statistical software. The second and third phases of the study involve the collection of qualitative data, which have potential to include researcher bias. The goal of the second and third phases was to understand the experience from the participants' perspectives. This strand in the study follows a phenomenological research philosophy where the researcher seeks to understand the

phenomenon being studied. Moustakas (1994) believed that “evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences” (p. 84).

As a researcher, I tried my best to remain unbiased during the analysis of this study. Moustakas (1994) described this as “Epoche” which means “we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p.85). As a researcher, I attempted to separate my personal and previous experiences of working with this population from working with this particular sample for this research study. I also believe using multiple data collection strategies to triangulate data in this mixed methods study assisted in providing more accurate and reliable results and decreasing potential biases.

## **Quantitative Component**

### **Population and Sample**

The target population for this study is defined as students at a research university (very high research activity as classified by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) in the southern region of the United States (Carnegie, 2010).

The accessible population for this study is defined as students who are selected as orientation leaders for the summer orientation program.

The sample for the quantitative component consisted of 19 students who interviewed and were selected as orientation leaders for summer 2010. Selection criteria were based on a written application, interview with a small committee of staff members including the summer orientation team leader, and a group interview with applicants who were observed by a small committee of staff members including the summer orientation team leader. The orientation team leader and the administrative staff make the ultimate decision of the summer orientation leaders. The committee of staff members was selected based on involvement and knowledge of the summer

orientation program and orientation leaders. The student applicants must be members of a student organization that is responsible for orienting all incoming students prior to their first day of class at the university. Their official responsibilities include orienting, recruiting, and advising all incoming students to the university.

### **Quantitative Instrument**

Prior to design of the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument, a meeting was held with the staff advisor of the summer orientation leaders. The advisor informed the researcher of key skills that she hopes the students learn or grow from during their summer experience. It was from those conversations that the areas of interest were noted to begin the development of the instrument. The advisor informed the researcher that she was not aware of any research similar to the study I was planning to conduct. From her years of experience, student testimonials have been the only means of descriptions used while recruiting future students to apply for an orientation leader position.

Additional information was gathered from literature, previous studies, and training manuals to form the design factors and components of the instrument (Ary et al., 2010; Church & Wacławski, 1998; Gebelein et al., 2000; Phelps, 2004). These resources provided guidance in designing an instrument that was both appropriate for the target audience as well as applicable to the subject matter.

A class of graduate research students, along with professors reviewed the instrument for content validity. Appropriate revisions were made to the instrument based on suggestions and comments made by reviewers. Adjustments were made to modify text language and verbiage for clarity and conciseness of statements.

A pilot test was performed during the spring semester 2010 with a group of student leaders. These students were members of the same organization as the orientation leaders, but students who were selected to serve as orientation leaders for the study did not participate in the pilot test. These leaders attended a weekend leadership conference. A pre-questionnaire was administered two days before the participants left for the conference. A post-questionnaire was administered a few days after the participants returned from the conference. This was the first time after the conference that the participants were all together for a meeting.

### **Qualitative Component**

The qualitative component of this study utilizes a phenomenological approach which is comprised of the processes including Epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). This method enables one to see an experience in its true sense. Moustakas claimed that phenomenology helps one to “move toward an intersubjective knowing of things, people, and everyday experiences” (1994, p. 101).

Epoche calls for the researcher to set aside prejudices and presumptions and look at an experience as if it is for the first time. In a way, an individual takes the approach of a new beginning or a fresh start when analyzing the data. Epoche requires openness to see what is really there and to come to know the phenomenon as it is presented. A challenge in Epoche is to remain transparent in both oneself and in viewing things. This provides the researcher with a genuine outlook on the experience. “We suspend everything that interferes with fresh vision” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86).

The next step, phenomenological reduction, requires the researcher to describe what one sees in textual language. This includes both the external output and the internal consciousness. This task entails the repetitive act of looking and describing the data multiple times, all while

keeping reference to the textural depictions. “The process involves a prereflective description of things just as they appear and a reduction to what is horizontal and thematic” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). In a way, phenomenological reduction takes the researcher through what exists in the world from the point of view of “self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 94).

The phenomenological reduction process involves bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering the horizons into themes, and organizing horizons and themes into textural descriptions. Bracketing allows the researcher to stay focused on the purpose of the study. This is achieved by keeping the research topic at the heart of the process and placing everything else aside. Moustakas (1994) described horizontalization as the means of treating every statement as equal in the initial analysis. Once the researcher acquires statements that are either irrelevant or repetitive, those statements are removed, leaving only the horizons. Horizons are then clustered into themes and then organized into a textural description. This final task of constructing a textural description begins with *Epoche* and returns to the state of self, leading to the meaning of the experience and ultimately the knowledge of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative variation is the third step of the qualitative research process. This process requires the researcher to look at the experience from varying perspectives and develop structural themes based on the textural descriptions acquired from phenomenological reduction. The emergence of numerous possibilities comes to fruition during this phase of the analysis as the researcher discovers that there is not one single path to truth (Moustakas, 1994).

The final step, synthesis, integrates the textural and structural depictions into a solid statement that describes the wholeness of the phenomenon. Although the analysis of an

experience can never be truly exhaustive, the synthesis phase represents the state of exhaustive imaginative and reflective study from the perspective of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

The following steps were used to analyze the qualitative component, which follows the modification of the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994).

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping – List every expression relevant to the experience (Horizontalization)
2. Reduction and Elimination – To determine the Invariant Constituents (horizons or meaning units). Test each expression for two requirements:
  - a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
  - b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience.Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.
3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents.
4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and themes by Application: Validation
5. Construct an Individual Textural Description of the experience.
6. Construct an Individual Structural Description of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.
7. Construct a Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.



From the Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions, develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole.

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 120-121).

### Timeline

The timeline for the participants serving in the role of orientation leader begins early in the spring semester. Selection for orientation team leader takes place in the fall semester, and selection of the orientation leaders takes place in early spring. Once the team is selected, orientation leaders participate in several trainings throughout the spring semester before the summer orientation sessions begin. Orientation leaders move in on campus approximately 10 days before the first orientation session. These students live on campus throughout the summer, and the final session takes place in mid-July. For this study, the researcher began the data collection when the orientation leaders moved in on campus. The data collection consisted of pre-questionnaire distributed on move-in day, post-questionnaire distributed following the final orientation session, observations throughout the summer during debriefing sessions, one-on-one interviews at the end of the summer, and follow-up focus group interviews in late fall semester. Figure 3 presents a visual representation of the timeline of data collection.

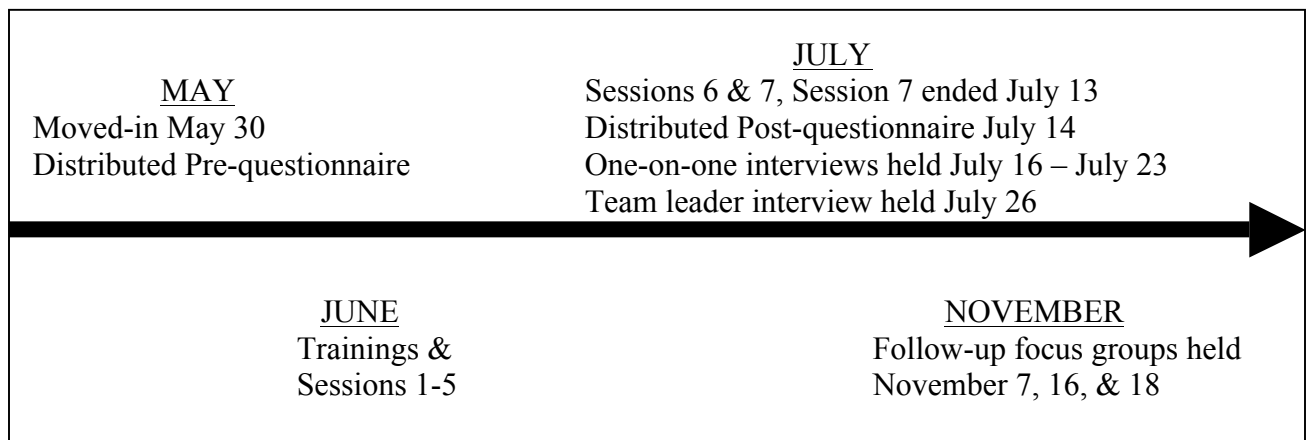


Figure 3: Timeline of Data Collection

## **Selection**

The summer orientation team leader plays a vital role in the summer orientation program. The team leader is responsible for the orientation leaders throughout the summer and is utilized as both a mentor and professional to the orientation leaders and administrative staff for the university. In order to apply for orientation team leader, an individual must have served as an orientation leader for a minimum of one summer. The orientation team leader application and selection process is extensive, including a written portfolio and an interview with a small committee of staff members. The orientation team leader is chosen in November for the following summer orientation program. As soon as the team leader is selected, he or she begins planning orientation leader interview agendas as well as trainings for the spring and summer semesters.

Orientation leader interviews are held in early spring semester. Each year, the make-up of the interviews is different, as the orientation team leader has the flexibility in planning, but the overall selection process, including a written application, personal interview, and group interview, remains consistent. For example, the orientation team leader may require each applicant to bring a special item that represents him or her to the personal interview. This could include a picture or an item that was influential from the past. The point of including this element in the interview process is to give the applicant an opportunity to explain who they were and maybe something unique about their past. Questions in the application and personal interview cover a wide variety of information. Applicants may be asked why they want to be an orientation leader for the summer, how they plan to manage the busy schedule, what attributes they can contribute to the team, etc. The group interview agenda is determined by the orientation team leader and involves different activities that address teamwork and communication skills.

There is very little time between the orientation leaders being selected and the beginning of trainings. Several trainings and meetings take place during the spring semester. Although the team leader believes these would be more beneficial if held closer to the summer, limited time and scheduling prevent that from happening. The orientation leaders also attend an overnight retreat, planned by the team leader, in which they decide on their theme for the summer and learn more about each other and the traits and characteristics they bring to the team. The orientation leaders are split up into subcommittees to carry out certain tasks for the summer. Some subcommittees work very closely with administrative staff to plan and organize activities throughout the program. While the team leader attempts to place each orientation leader in their preferred subcommittee, it may not always happen. The theme is used in several aspects during the summer, and it provides a way to bring cohesiveness to the team. The decorations committee uses the theme to decorate the residential hall for the summer. The evening activities committee works with the administrative staff to incorporate the theme in evening activities on the afternoon of day one. The team leader uses the theme throughout the summer in different activities and meetings.

Within the first few weeks after the team is selected, the orientation team leader assigns each orientation leader to a college. During orientation sessions, incoming students are assigned to groups based on their college major. The orientation leaders are responsible for communicating all necessary information pertaining to their college group throughout each session. In a majority of cases, orientation leaders are assigned to the college within their own major. Once assigned to their particular college, each orientation leader is required to meet with their assigned college counselor. During this time, they are to collect all necessary information on advising incoming students that attend summer orientation. A professional advisor is present

with the orientation leader during the advising period of the orientation session on the afternoon of day two.

### **Pre-questionnaire Distribution**

In this study, the orientation leaders moved into their residence hall on campus on May 30, 2010. The orientation leaders live on campus throughout the summer orientation program. The researcher met with the group of orientation leaders and explained the scope of the study and received consent from participants before distributing the pre-questionnaire. Each participant understood that they could withdraw from the study at any point and were not obligated to participate. The researcher did not explain that a post-questionnaire would be administered at the end of the summer because of the internal validity threat of testing. Onwuegbuzie (2000) described testing as the “changes that may occur in participants’ scores obtained on the second administration or post-intervention measure as a result of having taken the pre-intervention instrument” (p. 15). This is likely to occur when the time between administration of instruments is short.

The instrument was administered to the orientation leaders the day they moved onto campus. The researcher felt that this time would be most appropriate for administration since this was the initial transition to campus. Orientation leaders were given ample time in a comfortable setting to complete the questionnaire.

### **Trainings**

Beginning on May 30, 2010, the orientation leaders held trainings, meetings, and sessions for the following 10 days leading up to the first Freshman Orientation, Advising, and Pre-registration (FOAP) session. Within these 10 days, several academic and administrative departments at the university conducted trainings. These trainings included both instruction and

development and consisted of PowerPoint presentations, question and answer sessions, games, and valuable information to share with incoming students.

Other trainings during this 10-day period included activities for team building, goal setting, and situational preparation. MOCK FOAPticle Evaluations included a session where student orientation leaders practiced their presentations in front of a group of former orientation leaders and received feedback and mentoring on areas that needed improvement. Sticky Situations was a session where student orientation leaders were presented with typical scenarios and asked to respond accordingly. These scenarios ranged in all areas of the orientation experience, including working with conflict, communicating appropriately with parents, and managing a group of incoming students. While certain situations could not be predicted, this session allowed students the opportunity to recognize and practice appropriate and professional responses that had been experienced from previous years.

During this time frame, the orientation leaders also had different activities where they could set goals and fears for the summer. They were asked to answer and write down the following: what do you see as your biggest challenge for the summer, who is the student you are most afraid of, what are you most excited about, and how do you hope to grow during the summer? They kept their responses written down in their binder throughout the summer and referred to them multiple times, either in debriefing sessions or in personal conversations with the team leader or other orientation leaders. The orientation leaders also wrote a letter to themselves before the first session. The letter could include anything they wanted, and the team leader, orientation leaders, or any other staff member never read it. The orientation leaders re-read their letters during one of the debriefing meetings, and they were given time to reflect on

what they wrote down. They had an opportunity to share comments if they wanted to during that time.

Orientation leaders also experienced two orientation sessions prior to the first FOAP session. These sessions were unique in that they included incoming summer students (session 1) and transfer students (session 2). Requirements and agendas for these two sessions were different from the FOAP sessions. The orientation leaders did not have extensive responsibilities with students in these sessions.

Other activities held before the first FOAP session included logistics in preparation for the sessions (bag stuffing, table set-ups, etc.), committee meetings, and group practices. Orientation leaders also had opportunities to take personality and behavior questionnaires during these days to find out their strengths, weaknesses, and team attributes. Orientation leaders completed an activity titled “Johari Window” where they were able to share things they knew about themselves along with what attributes they saw in others. “Feedback flippers” were used throughout the summer where orientation leaders would hold up different cards when answering questions or during group discussions. Orientation leaders were also asked to draw a comic strip of their life as a way to share and get to know each other. These activities were very beneficial at the beginning of the summer to build team cohesion because leaders were not very familiar with each other.

### **Orientation Sessions**

Each orientation session, known as “FOAP,” is two days in length. On day one, incoming students and their parents arrive on campus in the morning. The orientation leaders are responsible for all aspects of the morning check-in process (i.e. set-up, distribution of orientation packet information, discussions with students and parents, answering questions about the FOAP

session). The orientation session begins with a welcome from the administration. The orientation leaders then perform a welcome performance (usually a mix of songs with a change in song lyrics to address the incoming student and the university) before they are dismissed with their groups. Groups are divided based on college major. Orientation leaders have one meeting before lunch with their group, and then students are dismissed to take advanced placement tests. The orientation leaders complete the day with an information fair for parents and students, evening meeting, dinner, and evening activities with their group. The orientation leaders follow evening activities with a debriefing meeting for the day. Incoming students stay in the residence hall where the orientation leaders are, and room checks are held at midnight. Orientation leaders typically don't end the night before 1:00 a.m., and they must be ready on day two before 7:00 a.m. Day two includes much more face-to-face time of orientation leaders with their groups. There is a morning meeting, and then all students attend a session in unison before lunch. The lunchtime slots are held in rotations (bookstore tour, first-year experience tour, and lunch) because of the large number of students in each session. Each orientation leader has a different schedule to follow for each session. The afternoon concludes with students scheduling their classes for the fall semester. At the end of day two, the orientation leaders participate in another debriefing meeting to re-cap and answer questions from the day.

### **Activities throughout Orientation Sessions**

Some of the activities utilized during training were included throughout the summer and in between FOAP sessions, such as "Feedback flippers." One activity, in particular, titled "Blackout" was a very emotional activity that took place in the middle of the summer. The orientation leaders gathered in a circle in the dark one night, and the team leader prepared a list of questions, starting from very simple and easy questions and moving to more personal

questions. An example at the start of the activity was “What was your favorite toy or game as a child?” Questions toward the end of the activity were more private and delicate and allowed some individuals to open up more than they expected with their fellow team members. This particular activity was mentioned several times during one-on-one interviews.

### **Debriefing Sessions**

Each debriefing session was semi-structured and led by the orientation team leader. Orientation leaders would discuss situations and issues that arose, and the team leader would address professional responses in handling these situations. The team leader also asked questions to leaders addressing thoughts and feelings throughout the sessions. Examples include “what were your initial feelings going into the session?” or “what did you learn from last session that you implemented for this session?” The orientation leaders became more comfortable with each other throughout the summer. Because of this, different activities were implemented in later sessions that brought a deeper understanding of each other and the team. The sessions included small and whole group discussions, journaling, and opportunities for orientation leaders to share thoughts about fellow team members. Some debriefing sessions were held in the classroom where orientation leaders held other meetings, and other sessions were held in an open lounge area. For example, one activity, titled Visual Explorer, took place in the open lounge area and allowed each orientation leader to select a picture (the pictures were decided by the researcher) to describe a fellow orientation team member. This activity required orientation leaders to think creatively and verbally express their thoughts about team members. This activity also allowed orientation leaders to hear explanations of what other team members believed to be their strengths. A benefit to doing this activity in the open lounge area was that orientation



leaders got to sit in a circle to interact rather than be confined in a classroom with rows and chairs.

The researcher filmed each debriefing session during the summer, with the exception of day one, FOAP 1 and day one, FOAP 2. The purpose of these debriefings was to reflect on the experiences from the day and answer any questions that were asked by orientation leaders. As in Kolb's experiential learning model, the second and third phases include both reflective observations and abstract conceptualizations (Kolb, 1984). The debriefing sessions allowed leaders to communicate what they had recognized for the day (reflective observation) through feelings, reactions, and observations. This time also allowed leaders the opportunity to share their beliefs with others and process their reactions together (abstract conceptualization). Debriefing sessions included a wide range of activities and allowed orientation leaders to reflect and conceptualize their thoughts and beliefs.

### **Post-questionnaire Distribution**

The researcher administered the post-questionnaire to the orientation leaders on Wednesday, July 14, 2010. The final session (FOAP 7) was completed on Tuesday, July 13, 2010. All but two orientation leaders were available at the planned meeting time to complete the questionnaire. The two leaders who were not present had personal matters that needed attention, but they completed the questionnaire later that afternoon and the researcher collected those that same day. The post-questionnaire was distributed in a classroom on campus and orientation leaders had ample time in a comfortable environment to complete the instrument.

### **One-on-one Interviews**

The researcher entered pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire numeric data into a spreadsheet. The difference in total pre-questionnaire versus total post-questionnaire scores was

used to select interviewees. Participants who showed the most and the least difference were selected for interviews. A total of 11 orientation leaders were selected for interviews. Semi-structured interviews were held from Friday, July 16, 2010, to Friday, July 23, 2010. Interviews varied in length, ranging from 40 minutes to 60 minutes. The researcher digitally recorded all interviews with the interviewee's consent. Interviewees were informed that all information would be kept confidential in the reporting process. Interviewees also had the option to ask the researcher to turn off the recorder at any point during the interview.

The researcher performed nine of the 11 interviews. Another professional who was familiar with the program and had a qualitative research background performed two of the 11 interviews. The researcher trained the professional so she was knowledgeable of the orientation program and provided the same guided questions throughout the interviews. This assistance was needed in order to complete interviews in an appropriate time frame. Because of the professional's background and familiarity with the program, interrater reliability was assured.

### **Team Leader Interview**

A one-on-one interview was held with the team leader on Monday, July 26, 2010. The purpose of this interview was to strengthen the study through triangulation (Patton, 1990). Triangulation allows the researcher "to collect, analyze and merge results to better understand a research problem" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 562). This interview covered the entire orientation program experience, from the time of selections through the seven weeks of FOAP sessions.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

Three small focus group discussions were held four months after the end of the orientation program to better understand the impact the summer orientation program had on the

orientation leaders. These discussions covered a range of questions including how the summer orientation leader experience affected the orientation leaders throughout the fall semester. The sessions were divided by gender. The first session included three males and the following two sessions were with females (one session with five females and the other session with three females).

### **Inference Process**

The inference process is the most important process in a mixed methods study. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) defined the inference process as “making sense out of the results of data analysis” (p. 289). The integration stage of this study involves a meta-inference across strands of the quantitative and qualitative findings. Effective mixed methods studies provide a better understanding only if the outcomes of the strands are integrated effectively. The inference process involves both inference quality and inference transferability. Inference quality refers to the quality of data, design, and data analysis procedures. Inference transferability addresses the degree to which conclusions can be applied in other settings and to other populations (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), the process of evaluation for inference quality requires the researcher to make separate inferences on each strand before moving to the meta-inference stage. An integration of the results is used to make “meaningful conclusions on the basis of consistent or inconsistent results. The term incorporates linking, elaboration, completeness, contrast, comparison, and the like” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 305). Guided by the purpose, research question, and objectives of the study, the researcher plans to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon that exists linking the summer orientation program to the personal development of orientation leaders.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact a summer orientation program has on the personal development of orientation leaders at a research university (very high research activity as classified by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) in the southern United States (Carnegie, 2010). The target population was defined as students at a research university in the southern region of the United States. The accessible population for this study was defined as students who are selected as orientation leaders for the summer orientation program. The sample size for this study was 19 participants. This study followed a mixed methods design, which incorporates a blended approach of both quantitative and qualitative techniques (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The study was sequential in nature, meaning results in one phase of the study dictated data collected in a subsequent phase (Ary et al., 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The accessible population was surveyed using a Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument designed by the researcher. Findings and analysis of this survey are presented in objectives one and two in this chapter. Results from this quantitative component were used to select individuals for the subsequent phase in this study. The researcher entered numeric data from the pre-questionnaires and post-questionnaires into a spreadsheet to determine the difference in total scores. Individuals showing a large difference and a small difference in total score were selected for interviews. A total of 11 individuals were selected for interviews and follow-up focus group discussions. The researcher felt that these individuals would provide a rich perspective to the purpose of the study.

The results of the study are arranged and presented by research objective and include objectives one through four.

### **Objective One**

Objective one was to describe orientation leaders on selected demographic characteristics. These characteristics include:

- a. Gender
- b. Age
- c. College Major
- d. Father's Highest Education Level Completed
- e. Mother's Highest Education Level Completed

Information was gathered from the respondents on the demographic portion of the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument designed by the researcher.

#### **Gender**

Regarding gender, the majority of the participants ( $n = 15$ , 78.9%) indicated their gender was female. Four (21.1%) of the respondents were male. Table 1 illustrates data regarding the gender of the survey respondents.

Table 1  
Gender Distribution of the Respondents to the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument

Gender	<i>n</i>	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
Female	15	78.9
Males	4	21.1
Total	19	100

<sup>a</sup>Total rounded to 100.0%

#### **Age**

Regarding age, respondents were asked to circle the appropriate category at the time the pre-questionnaire was distributed. Categories included "18," "19," "20," "21," and "22." The

largest group of the participants ( $n = 13$ , 68.4%) was 19 years of age. Four (21.1%) of the respondents were 20 years of age, one (5.2%) of the respondents was 18 years of age, and one (5.2%) of the respondents was 21 years of age. Table 2 illustrates data regarding age of the survey respondents.

Table 2  
Age Distribution of the Respondents to the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument

Age	<i>n</i>	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
18	1	5.2
19	13	68.4
20	4	21.1
21	1	5.3
Total	19	100

<sup>a</sup>Total rounded to 100.0%

### College Major

Regarding college major, respondents were asked to write their college major at the time the pre-questionnaire was distributed. Participants in the study covered a variety of different college majors. Three participants (16.0%) were psychology majors, two participants (10.8%) were elementary education majors, and two participants (10.8%) were kinesiology majors. The remainder of the majors had one participant (5.2%) in each category (communication disorders, English secondary education, geography, history, mass communications, nursing, painting and drawing, sociology, and textiles, apparel, and merchandising). Table 3 illustrates data regarding college major of the survey respondents.

Table 3  
College Major Distribution of the Respondents to the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument

College Major	<i>n</i>	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
Psychology	3	16.0
Elementary Education	2	10.8
Kinesiology	2	10.8

(Table Continue)

Biological Engineering	1	5.2
Communication Disorders	1	5.2
English Secondary Education	1	5.2
Geography	1	5.2
History	1	5.2
Mass Communications	1	5.2
Nursing	1	5.2
Painting and Drawing	1	5.2
Political Science	1	5.2
Public Relations	1	5.2
Sociology	1	5.2
Textiles, Apparel, Merchandising	1	5.2
Total	19	100

<sup>a</sup>Total rounded to 100.0%

### **Father's Highest Education Level Completed**

Regarding father's highest education level completed, respondents were asked to select their father's highest education level completed at the time the pre-questionnaire was distributed. For the father's highest education completed, categories were "High School/GED," "Vocational/technical school," "Some College," "Associate's degree," "Bachelor's degree," "Master's degree," "Doctoral degree," "Professional degree (i.e. MD, JD, etc.)," or "Other." The largest group of the participants ( $n = 5$ , 25.8%) recorded that their fathers completed a "Bachelor's degree." Four (21.1%) of the respondents selected "High School/GED," four (21.1%) of the respondents indicated "Some College," three (16.0%) of the respondents' fathers received a "Master's degree," and two (10.8%) of the respondents' fathers received a "Doctoral degree."

### **Mother's Highest Education Level Completed**

Regarding mother's highest education level completed, respondents were asked to select their mother's highest education level completed at the time the pre-questionnaire was distributed. For the mother's highest education completed, categories were "High School/GED,"

“Vocational/technical school,” “Some College,” “Associate’s degree,” “Bachelor’s degree,” “Master’s degree,” “Doctoral degree,” “Professional degree (i.e. MD, JD, etc.),” or “Other.” The largest group of the participants ( $n = 6$ , 31.4%) recorded that their mothers received a “Master’s degree.” Five (26.3%) of the respondents selected “High School/GED,” five (26.3%) of the respondents’ mothers received a “Bachelor’s degree,” two (10.8%) of the respondents indicated “Some College,” and one (5.2%) of the respondents indicated “Vocational/technical school.”

Table 4 illustrates data regarding father’s highest education level of the survey respondents.

Table 5 illustrates data regarding mother’s highest education level of the survey respondents.

Table 4

Father’s Highest Education Level Distribution of the Respondents to the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument

Father's highest education level	<i>n</i>	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
High School/GED	4	21.1
Some College	4	21.1
Associate’s degree	1	5.2
Bachelor’s degree	5	25.8
Master's degree	3	16.0
Doctoral degree	2	10.8
Total	19	100

<sup>a</sup>Total rounded to 100.0%

Table 5

Mother’s Highest Education Level Distribution of the Respondents to the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument

Mother's highest education level	<i>n</i>	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
High School/GED	5	26.3
Vocational/Technical	1	5.2
Some College	2	10.8
Bachelor’s Degree	5	26.3
Master's Degree	6	31.4
Total	19	100

<sup>a</sup>Total rounded to 100.0%



## Objective Two

Objective two was to determine the overall pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire scores of skill development as measured by the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument. Further analysis was performed to determine if differences existed in post-questionnaire total scores with regard to the variables of gender, age, father's highest education level completed, and mother's highest education level completed. Additional analysis was conducted to determine if a difference existed in pre-questionnaire total scores and post-questionnaire total scores.

The researcher entered pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire data into a spreadsheet. The pre-questionnaire mean score was 148.47 with a standard deviation of 11.10. Post-questionnaire mean score was 169.74 with a standard deviation of 11.16. Table 6 illustrates the description of the level of agreement of participants in each item of the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument. A copy of the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument is included in Appendix 1.

Table 6  
Description of the Level of Agreement of Participants with the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument

Abbreviated Question		Pre-questionnaire <sup>a</sup>			Post-questionnaire <sup>a</sup>		
		M <sup>b</sup>	SD	Category <sup>c</sup>	M <sup>b</sup>	SD	Category <sup>c</sup>
1	Speak with enthusiasm in front of a group	3.37	0.60	SA	3.79	0.42	SA
2	Listen patiently without interrupting	3.00	0.58	A	3.42	0.51	SA
3	Articulate words when giving a presentation	3.16	0.69	A	3.42	0.61	SA
4	Ask questions to clarify other's point of view	3.11	0.74	A	3.42	0.61	SA
5	Listen willingly to other's concerns	3.16	0.60	A	3.79	0.42	SA
6	Make eye contact when I speak to a group	3.32	0.58	SA	3.74	0.56	SA

(Table Continue)

7	Get my point across the first time I present	3.05	0.62	A	3.63	0.50	SA
8	Listen carefully to questions of others	3.16	0.60	A	3.79	0.42	SA
9	Adapt to the level of detail to match audience needs	3.11	0.57	A	3.58	0.69	SA
10	Make eye contact when I listen to others	3.58	0.51	SA	3.79	0.42	SA
11	Speak confidently in front of a group	3.11	0.57	A	3.84	0.50	SA
12	Connect with my audience during presentations	3.16	0.60	A	3.79	0.42	SA
13	Accurately interpret nonverbal body language	3.00	0.67	A	3.47	0.51	SA
14	Make adjustments to presentation when necessary	2.89	0.57	A	3.84	0.37	SA
15	Demonstrate genuine interest when listening	3.47	0.51	SA	3.63	0.50	SA
16	Display nonverbal behaviors that show I care	3.32	0.58	SA	3.58	0.61	SA
17	I am approachable.	3.37	0.83	SA	3.74	0.45	SA
18	Work effectively when required to be flexible	3.05	0.62	A	3.79	0.42	SA
19	Adjust my response based on cues from others	2.95	0.52	A	3.58	0.61	SA
20	Patient when working in a group	2.95	0.52	A	3.21	0.54	A
21	I am a conversationalist.	3.16	0.69	A	3.53	0.61	SA
22	Relate to people regardless of personality or background	3.16	0.69	A	3.58	0.51	SA
23	Flexible when interacting with a group	3.11	0.57	A	3.63	0.50	SA
24	Treat people with respect	3.74	0.45	SA	3.89	0.32	SA
25	Keep my composure under difficult circumstances	3.00	0.88	A	3.42	0.69	SA
26	Readily adapt to change	2.79	0.79	A	3.58	0.51	SA
27	Share my opinion at appropriate times	3.00	0.67	A	3.47	0.61	SA
28	Maintain a positive attitude when handling my mistakes	2.89	0.74	A	3.11	0.74	A
29	Consider others when making decisions	3.42	0.61	SA	3.63	0.50	SA
30	Cope effectively with stress	2.74	0.93	A	3.42	0.61	SA
31	Ask for constructive criticism from others	3.00	0.67	A	3.53	0.61	SA

(Table Continue)

32	Comfortable giving feedback to others	2.42	0.69	D	3.32	0.82	SA
33	Remain open-minded when attempting new ideas	3.16	0.69	A	3.58	0.51	SA
34	Remain objective when problem solving	3.05	0.62	A	3.42	0.69	SA
35	Analyze problems from multiple perspectives	3.11	0.66	A	3.53	0.51	SA
36	Not afraid to ask tough questions	2.89	0.66	A	3.53	0.61	SA
37	Confident in my decisions	2.89	0.74	A	3.68	0.58	SA
38	Eager to acquire new knowledge	3.47	0.61	SA	3.84	0.37	SA
39	Anticipate potential consequences of situations	3.16	0.83	A	3.47	0.61	SA
40	Hesitant to make decisions	2.68	0.82	A	2.00	0.82	D
41	Trust my use of reason to solve problems	3.32	0.67	SA	3.58	0.51	SA
42	Tend to see through the complexity of problems	2.63	0.76	A	3.16	0.69	A
43	Take time to analyze situations	3.16	0.90	A	3.42	0.69	SA
44	I am open-minded towards the opinions of others	3.26	0.56	SA	3.53	0.51	SA
45	Trust my ability to solve difficult problems	3.11	0.46	A	3.68	0.48	SA
46	Approach problems in a logical way	3.16	0.83	A	3.26	0.87	SA
47	Determine the source of the problem	2.79	0.85	A	3.21	0.71	A
48	Handle a wide variety of problems	2.95	0.52	A	3.89	0.32	SA
	<b>Overall</b>	3.09	0.62	A	3.54	0.62	SA

<sup>a</sup>Sample size = 19

<sup>b</sup>Response scale: 1 = strongly disagree (SD), 2 = disagree (D), 3 = agree (A), 4 = strongly agree (SA)

<sup>c</sup>Interpretive scale: 1 - 1.75 = SD, 1.76 - 2.50 = D, 2.51 - 3.25 = A, 3.26 - 4.0 = SA

### Further Analysis

Further analysis was conducted to determine if differences existed in post-questionnaire scores by the categories of gender, age, father's highest education level completed, and mother's highest education level completed. Homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's test statistic.

The variable “Gender” was the first variable considered in the analysis. The Levene’s test statistic for homogeneity of variance was not significant ( $p = .689$ ). Thus, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data to see if a difference existed in post-questionnaire total scores with regard to gender. Results provided no statistically significant differences for gender at .05 two-tailed level for post-questionnaire total scores with  $F = .039$ ,  $p = .845$ .

When considering the category “Age,” categories were combined because of a small number of participants in certain categories. The age categories of “18” and “19” were combined to “18-19” and the categories of “20” and “21” were combined to “20-21.” Levene’s statistic was not significant with  $p = .166$ . Using the ANOVA technique, the F test showed no statistically significant difference of post-questionnaire total scores by age with  $F = .238$ ,  $p = .632$ .

The category of “Father’s highest education level completed” was the third variable considered in the analysis. Due to a small number in categories, the researcher combined “High School/GED,” “Some College,” and “Associate’s degree” in one category and “Bachelor’s degree,” “Master’s degree,” and “Doctoral degree” in another category. The Levene’s test was not significant with  $p = .593$ . Utilizing an ANOVA, results indicated a statistically significant difference in post-questionnaire scores with regard to father’s highest education level completed with  $F = 5.993$ ,  $p = .026$ . Table 7 illustrates differences in participants’ post-questionnaire total scores between father’s highest education level completed.

The final variable analyzed was “Mother’s highest level of education completed.” Due to a small number in categories, the researcher combined “High School/GED,” “Vocational/technical school,” and “Some College” in one category. “Bachelor’s degree” and

“Master’s degree” were combined in a second category. The Levene’s test of Homogeneity of Variance was not significant with  $p = .167$ . Using an ANOVA technique, findings indicated the post-questionnaire scores showed a statistically significant difference with  $F = 6.943$ ,  $p = .017$ . Table 8 illustrates differences in participants’ post-questionnaire total scores between mother’s highest education level completed. Tables 7 and 8 illustrate the analysis of variance of overall means of post-questionnaire total scores between father’s highest education level completed and mother’s highest education level completed.

Table 7

Analysis of Variance of Overall Means of Post-questionnaire Total Scores between Father’s Highest Education Level Completed for Participants of the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P value</b>
Between Groups	584.795	1	584.795	5.993	0.026*
Within Groups	1658.889	17	97.582		
Total	2243.684	18			

\* $p > .05$

Table 8

Analysis of Variance of Overall Means of Post-questionnaire Total Scores between Mother’s Highest Education Level Completed for Participants of the Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P value</b>
Between Groups	650.627	1	650.627	6.943	0.017*
Within Groups	1593.057	17	93.907		
Total	2243.684	18			

\* $p > .05$

The dependent samples t-test yielded a statistically significant result in pre-questionnaire total scores and post-questionnaire total scores ( $t = -9.280$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Table 9 illustrates data of the t-test results.

Table 9  
Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre Total - Post Total	-21.26	9.988	2.291	-26.077	-16.449	-9.280	18	0.000

### Objective Three

Objective three was to identify themes among orientation leader responses with respect to their experience of the summer orientation program. The researcher gathered this data through one-on-one interviews held with 11 participants. Selection of participants was based on difference in total pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire scores. Individuals showing large and small differences were selected for interviews. The results of this objective were achieved utilizing a phenomenological research philosophy. According to Moustakas (1994), a phenomenology focused on the “appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given” and was “concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of the phenomenon or experience is achieved” (p. 58).

The following is a list of guided questions that were asked for the one-on-one interviews.

1. How does the FOAP leader experience compare with other leadership experiences you have had - whether from others at LSU or from high school? Talk about the similarities and differences. What are some words that describe the past six weeks? How do you feel now that it is over?

2. How would you describe confidence? What would you see in someone who was confident? How would someone define your confidence?
3. Would you say you have good communication skills? How so? Can you provide some examples? Compare how you felt going into a room with your group from FOAP 1 to FOAP 7.
4. What are some skills you learned this summer about communicating effectively? Can you give some examples of how you communicated? Was communicating with parents different? If so, how?
5. Do you feel that working as an orientation leader has changed your teamwork skills? Were you able to contribute to your team and how so?
6. Do you feel being an orientation leader has changed your decision-making skills? Can you give an example of when you had to make a decision on your own? What support did you use to make that decision? (training, learning from someone else or perhaps your gut feeling?) Do you think this will help you in your future college career? How so?
7. What were your best experiences of the summer? What were your worst experiences of the summer?
8. Do you think leaders are born or made? Do you think individuals can enhance their leadership by working FOAP? How so? How would you explain to someone how an individual changes through FOAP?
9. What are your thoughts about reapplying to be a FOAP leader or maybe applying to be team leader next year? Any concerns? Financial concerns?
10. If a good friend of yours were to ask you what changes have occurred in your personal development since the start of this program – what would you say and why would you say it?

To begin the analysis from the interviews, each interview was transcribed verbatim. As the researcher, I conducted nine of the 11 interviews, so I was very familiar with the content, but still felt it was necessary to reread each interview several times, taking moments to reflect on the experience, as the interviewees perceived it. Moustakas (1994) referred to this as *Epoche*, where we look at the experience from what it appears to be. We take out biases and prejudgments and look at what is really there. The horizontalization process involved rereading the interviews and noting every expression that was relevant to the experience, giving each equal value. Through *Epoche* and horizontalization, I was able to organize and separate the data into invariant horizons

or meaning units. Once I gathered the meaning units, I clustered them into themes.

Triangulation was accomplished using a second researcher who analyzed the data and validated common themes that were clustered. These themes represent the core elements of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The table below includes the themes followed by the meaning units gathered from the data.

Table 10  
Themes and Descriptions of Personal Development of Orientation Leaders

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Security in Identity	Comfort with myself and others Realization of who I am
Confidence	Handling situations Opening up to others Future opportunities
Relationships/Connections/Teamwork	Team bonding Trust Incoming student connections Role as team member
Experiential Learning	Multiple sessions to attempt different approaches Training didn't always help
Role/Future Role in Society	Importance of orientation leader role Potential to change career path

Individual textural and structural descriptions were not included in this analysis as the researcher felt the identities of the interviewees could be potentially compromised. This objective concludes with the final composite thematic textural structural representation of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole.

### **Security in Identity**

Throughout the summer orientation program, orientation leaders expressed a development in the security of their identity, both from a personal perspective and from a team perspective. Some of these aspects included understanding personal traits, such as two participants' comments saying, "I've always been a big picture type person, but now I'm more detail oriented and I pick up on little things I didn't pick up on before. Within my team, I'm



picking up on little things about them..." and "I kind of trust myself more at making them [decisions]. I know that I definitely think about them before I make them. So I guess I learned not to doubt myself as much when it comes to decision making."

Another participant mentioned how working on a team helped her realize her own strengths and weaknesses. The following quote could connect with the Relationships/Connections/Teamwork theme, but the researcher chose to place it under this theme.

I've never really been on a team before. I didn't play sports or anything like that and this is my first experience working with a team. I've really learned how to use my strengths and my weaknesses to help build a better team and collaborate with other people and share ideas and brainstorm, and also having other people's backs and knowing that other people have my back and knowing that it is okay to ask for help when needed and that kind of a thing.

Other interviews revealed an understanding and comfort with "myself." Through this experience, students revealed an ease with understanding and acceptance of who they are. When asked how you would describe FOAP to a good friend, a participant said, "I would tell them that FOAP was the best decision that I could make as a student learning about myself, learning about life, learning about others, leadership and teamwork. I don't think it gets much more involved than FOAP does." Another participant answered that question the following way:

I would share with them about how much more confident I am in who I am and my personality, and the fact that I am an interesting person. People do want to be friends with me. That was something that I did not have, confidence that I did not have before. ... I did not want to branch out because I was afraid of rejection, and coming out of this experience makes me want to walk up to somebody new, "Hi, let's be friends!" I know that I do have the ability to do that now. I am an entertaining person. People want to be my friend, which is something that definitely grew out of the FOAP experience.

The following statement could have been placed under the Confidence theme, but the researcher decided to include it here. One leader described FOAP like this:

I found myself. I found that I'm probably not going to be good friends with people anymore because you're probably not going to like me anymore. I'm not going to change to be – I feel like I found a group of people that I – types of people that I belong with, not the types of people that I belong with because I'm not saying that like I'm going to be with ambassador type people for the rest of my life. I'm just saying I'm not going to change to fit somebody else.

Another student said confidence helped her be herself in front of others. Again, this statement overlaps with the Confidence theme.

I have gained 10 times more confidence than I had going into it. I have gained that sense of realizing that people are different and that you need to accept that. I gained ability to not stereotype as much. Then, I think I've gained some - it's helped my personality more, because I feel like I can be myself for all these people, which helps me be myself around my stranger students that I had.

One participant explained his comfort with identity like this:

I'm more comfortable with myself and the joy that I bring to the team. I'm more relaxed with that kind of thing. I don't know if that's really easy to explain, but just being able to really be comfortable with the fact that other people look to my enthusiasm. Because that's a big thing. Knowing that other people look to me and understanding that, and then still being able to be enthusiastic is something else that I think is good for me.

Another student said “once you're comfortable with yourself, that's like the best it's going to get.

You're good. Once you're learning about yourself and how you deal with things, then you're going to be a leader.”

Some participants mentioned that FOAP provides an opportunity to realize and be comfortable with who you are so you can help others. Examples included one participant's comments that “... I learned more about myself, so I can help other people, other students, find themselves, as well.” and

I know in the beginning, we would do things like write our own comic book, talk about our lives, and I was just like, "Okay, this is easy. We can just do a minimum part of it." But it wasn't until towards the middle and really, the activities, there was no easy way out or getting around it. You had to open up, and I feel like everybody started to see that and I feel like leadership, you can't lead somebody unless you can be confident in yourself. So I feel like going through FOAP forces you, in a good way, to realize yourself and then after that you can be a good leader.

Although FOAP was an intense summer program, one student was able to make a connection of FOAP to life outside of the summer orientation program.

I had a very unique experience with that because while I was going through the life changing experience that is FOAP, because everybody says once you do FOAP you're never the same after. I had parallels in my life. I was going through some changes. It was like realizations about my life. Just coming to terms with what I am, who I am, who I want to be around...

Some securities in identity related to a leader's role on the team. This comment could have been placed with Relationships/Connections/Teamwork theme.

I think I've learned to be a little bit more flexible at things, like I said my strong-willed personality. I like to see my idea come into fruition. But being flexible and being considerate, maybe, of other people's ideas as well is something that I've definitely had to take into mind. So that's definitely something that I've learned, is being opened to other's people's ideas as much as my own.

The security in identity theme truly blossomed during the summer. Participants learned to accept themselves for who they are. They are more comfortable in their skin and who they want to surround themselves with.

## **Confidence**

Orientation leaders faced several different situations throughout the summer. Some of the situations called for an instant solution, and leaders were placed in positions where they were the decision makers. They had to portray confidence in their responses and remain confident in the decisions they made. For example, one leader had a student that had to leave evening activities early, and she had to decide whether or not the student could receive a sticker as part of participating in the activity.

The correct thing to do would be not to give her a sticker because it's not fair to give her a sticker at 8:30 whenever I'm supposed to wait 30 minutes. But I just gave her a sticker. She came, which is more than most of the other students have done. She doesn't want to leave. Her brother got in a car wreck. You use your emotion for that more than using what you're actually supposed to schedule to do.

Another leader had a student who had to miss the evening meeting, where a large portion of important information is covered.

She approached me right as we were leaving from our morning meeting, saying, "Hey, I'm not going to be able to go to the night meeting. I'm in a play, I have a rehearsal." It was some kind of dress rehearsal or a rehearsal leading up to a performance that she absolutely could not miss. And unfortunately, our night meeting is where we learn and let them know the bulk of how to schedule and so it's something that if she missed class, "Oh, God, she's going to miss. That means tomorrow I'm going to have to take time-out from all the other students to try to explain to her." But then after, you know, "Well, how about this? What if you showed up, 10, 15 minutes early to the morning meeting? I'll go over everything we went over last night. I can answer any questions you have. So that way, when our morning meeting tomorrow starts, you're going to be on the same page as everybody else so it won't make that huge of a difference that you had to miss tonight's meeting." She did that and it went smoothly, it went flawlessly. That way, she was caught up by the time that meeting actually started. She was on the same page. It was like she had been to the night meeting the night before, all along. So I feel like that was something that worked really well, as far as someone, on the spot telling me, "Hey, I'm unable to go to this," or, "I have to miss this.

One leader talked about a situation with a student where she felt unprepared to answer his question.

This one student came up to me and he asked me if fraternities would let gay guys in or should he rush letting them know that or should you hide it. ... So I literally froze and I was like, "I'm not sure but let me just think about this. I don't normally get this question." ... I should tell him to be himself. It wasn't until then that I realized I – I feel like the next day, I did go up to him afterwards and I told him that it doesn't matter. Tell them because if they don't let you in then it's their fault for not letting you in, but at the same time, you don't have to hide yourself. And I feel like that decision was probably, like that was when it literally hit me that - don't do for it other people. And that's when I realized I shouldn't do things for other people.

Working with people in general has its difficult moments. Some leaders faced difficult situations with students, even those who may not have been in their own group.

This student would not keep his eyes open. ... So I asked him twice, two or three times, to stop. ... He wasn't just falling asleep, because I understand that, you're tired. But he was disrespectful, so he flipped me off. That, to me, is so disrespectful. I understand people do it to their friends, joking, but I'm so sensitive to that for some reason, and for him to do that in front of the rest of the students was the ultimate, the most disrespectful thing that's ever happened to me throughout all of my orientation sessions, even last year.

That was the only time I froze, but that was the only time I didn't know how to react. And it might have been because we've never done a sticky situation like that so I didn't know. ... So I waited for him to turn back around and I picked up my book sack and I walked to the back and I just started crying, because I didn't want anyone to see me cry. I wanted to be the strong person, even though that's not me. ... So you made it through this morning. You didn't fall asleep and you stopped talking after awhile?" He was like, "Yeah," trying to make light of it. I said, "I just want to let you know that it's not really respectful to flip anyone off. He was like, "Oh, well I wasn't trying to be...." By the end of it I even liked him. Even someone as horrible as that, he was like the devil to me five hours ago, and then you pull them aside and you know there's good in him.

Another student talked about how she remained professional even though a student was disrespectful to her. She said

...rather than breaking down like I did at debrief for Session 5, I was able to calmly handle the situation and let the student know, you know, that he was being extremely disrespectful and later on, you know, he did come up to me and apologize, which said a lot to me that I handled the situation correctly and in a manner to where I did earn his respect, and afterward he felt he needed to apologize.

One leader talked about how she worked with a rude student and used humor to get through a tough situation.

I had a student, he wasn't in my group but he ran up to me and he was very complicated, "I don't know where my group is." I was trying to help him and you could just tell he was very high. I was trying to work with him, trying to get him where he was supposed to be. He wasn't in my group and his group was far across campus. I was trying to help him get there and he was just being very rude to me, and then he started kind of like making fun of me and kind of giving me a hard time. I was like, "I'm trying to help you, and you are disrespecting me like that. You don't know how much time and effort that I've put into all of this to be here for you and then you disrespect me like that." I felt really unappreciated. I hated that. That was really a challenge for me because I know I'm supposed to be there for the students, and at that point I was like, "He can walk as far away from me and not schedule classes . . . and I wouldn't care." That was just really hard for me. I kind of tried to answer back. Anytime he would say something I would try to joke around with it, kind of play into it, kind of make light of the situation, even though I was really upset.

Orientation leaders also had several opportunities to work and communicate with parents of incoming students. One participant pointed out the importance of being professional with parents.

When you're talking to a parent, you need to seem very professional and put together. You need to be confident when you're talking to the students but even more confident when you're faced with the parents because they are looking at you thinking, you may be 20 years younger than them and they are trusting you with information, so you want to make them feel comfortable as well, to trust you.

One leader tried to remain professional even through a conversation with a parent who didn't seem to want to listen to his comments.

So, me telling her about stuff that she already knew about wasn't quelling her fears at all. Well, professionalism, I feel is something that is like an outer skin that you can change out with, things like friendship, things like that. So like, whenever I'm talking to my friends, my skin, on the outside, is very playful. It's very just relaxed and hang-out kind of a thing. So, whenever I'm talking to my students with that friendship mask, you know what I mean things are coming off light-hearted, and whenever it gets to a sticky situation, I have to kind of joke about it, and it usually quells it down pretty quick. But the moment things need to get settled, like with a parent or with a student who wasn't just really paying attention or something like that, that's whenever those skins, those masks, change.

Very few people realize the scope of serving as an orientation leader. One participant received a positive statement from a professional staff member about his conversation with a parent.

The dad walked up and he approached you and it was kind of an aggressive approach and the first thing that you did, you stepped back, you introduced yourself, you shook his hand, you asked his name and then you proceeded to deal with the problem at hand." I was, "You know, you're right," because at the beginning had somebody come to me aggressively like that I probably would have folded my arms, stepped back, gave them a disconcerting look, so I really think I have improved in that area.

One particular instance involved an angry parent who was upset with information given by an orientation leader. This parent went far enough to call this leader incompetent.

One instance and this is my one run-in with a parent, a helicopter parent, I was standing in front of the Cox Center, and this is where the parents check-in, but they check-in with their child if the child doesn't have their registration information with them. So I'm letting this parent know this, but the parent needs to go check-in 139 Allen, which is right across the street. She didn't believe me and she was actually looking at the itinerary and the check-in information for the students. And with the students it says, "Yes, you check-in to the Cox Center," but she would not believe me, that it was in Allen Hall. So she called me incompetent. She told me I didn't know what I was talking about and she couldn't wait to talk to my boss and tell them about how rude I was, the entire time. ... So it made me laugh the entire time. I didn't get frustrated by it; it just goes to show that

even though you have good communication skills, sometimes you just can't get through to people.

The area of confidence has changed in each leader differently. Personally, this experience has helped leaders see their own potential. One leader mentioned that she feels she can handle anything now after being faced with a challenging student. "I felt like I could handle that situation. I felt like I could handle anything now, coming through that, just because that student really bothered – I could tell it bothered me just personally..." Another leader mentioned that as her own confidence grew, the communication with her students grew. "I really struggled to fit in, not forming friendships that they were saying I was going to form. That was where I really struggled. As my confidence in that grew, it reflected in how I acted towards my students." One leader's idea and definition for confidence changed throughout the summer.

I thought confidence going in would be, just standing up in front of a group of students and talking and like knowing that you know the information. If they have questions, you can answer them, and that that was the line of confidence. Actually going through the process with the team and doing all the team building activities and stuff, I feel like confidence is more of being able to open yourself up, to let the FOAP process come in. And to open yourself up to these strangers who weirdly do not become strangers, even it's like the short time; they turn into like family type.

Another leader talked about opening up and how that will help her in the future. She said

...this summer really helped show me that there were people that I could relate to on campus and how it really has put a lot of confidence in me, and I saw what I really could do when I opened up. So I feel like next time I'm in a situation where I really don't know anybody, I feel like I'm going to be able to put myself out there a little bit more, because I saw this summer what does happen when I open up. ... "I feel like I can honestly walk into a room of strangers now and be able to not be the quiet girl sitting in the corner anymore, but actually put myself out there and take a chance on being able to make beautiful friendships.

Opening up to teammates helped one leader with her communication skills.

I closed myself off to some things and then finally, when I had that pivotal moment in FOAP session, when I opened up and I read something that I don't normally read, it was like then that I gained the highest communication skills I could have gained in this experience.

Other leaders mentioned that “I kind of didn't have faith in me being able to carry on responsibility and being able to be a leader. Everything over the summer has just showed me that I can take it and that I can be a good leader” and “I feel like I can do anything, like be put in a situation, thrown somewhere and I can handle it.” One leader explained that this experience has given her the confidence to handle any group or situation. “It makes me feel like if I can do that with this kind of group then I could be able to do that with another organization or another group, or another group of students, or definitely a group of 10 year olds, or maybe for 50 year olds.” Growing in confidence personally overlaps with the security in identity theme. Another leader said

...whenever I became confident in my abilities and knowing I could handle situations and I knew what I was talking about. Then I felt more like I could open up and tell my opinion. Before, I felt like I couldn't really voice my opinion if I wasn't confident about what I was going to say.

One leader described his confidence as an inner confidence.

I feel like there is a confidence about me where I do not necessarily care if the person likes what I say or not, but I am able to be proud and I am able to explain exactly where I'm coming from without fearing what somebody else might think or what may be their belief or how they feel about a certain situation. I think there is an inner confidence, too and with that inner confidence, I can go into a room and I am not nervous anymore. I don't shake. I don't stutter. I don't do all these things that sometimes even adults will do when they are talking to a group of people.

Even if you had a high level of confidence coming into FOAP, the experience itself allowed you to open up more and be confident in yourself. “I'm a confident person. I was whenever I got here, but it's just being involved with these people for so long and getting to trust them, it helps to open up and be more confident about yourself.” Another leader also felt confident coming into the summer orientation program, but she never thought she would be able to manage 600 parents and students on the morning of day one.



When I worked out front, on the Field House side, at one point I realized before the doors were opened, "There are 600 students and their parents staring at me. I am the only thing - me in my little polo is the only thing between them and their college experience." That was horrifying! (Scared) Being in that type of situation, everyone had to experience that. You had to be able to look at all those parents, and say, "I am going to have to ask you to leave," divide the students up by alphabet, and you could not be quiet. You had to actually step up and do it. I never thought I was going to be able to do something like that and I was very confident coming into my leadership ability.

The summer orientation experience helped one leader realize how important it was not to jump to conclusions.

Before FOAP, I probably would have jumped to conclusions and things like that quicker just because being, you know, dumped into a situation like FOAP, a world like FOAP, so to speak, where it is so diverse and you can't really just jump to conclusions about things. That whole mind-set, I guess you could say, has really taught me that you can't do that. You can't just jump to conclusions about things, which really ended up working well for me, because it kind of goes hand-in-hand with, you know, how I approach problems.

One leader talked about how FOAP allowed her to gain the confidence to be part of another event on campus. She felt that she wouldn't have volunteered to be a part of this had she not worked as an orientation leader.

...they do tours the first day before school starts and all ambassadors, after orientation ended, all ambassadors are invited to do this - and also we signed up for the shift, and usually there are five students. This year they had 50. So I had to give a tour to fifty students. If I hadn't worked orientation, there's no way I could have done that. I would have gone home. I would have made up some excuse not to do it. I know I would have done that. But having worked orientation, it goes back to confidence; it gives you so much confidence that you can't learn anywhere else...

The change in confidence was different for each of the leaders. Some utilized what they learned from the experience to gain confidence for future situations. Others gained confidence in themselves that they were able to transfer to relationships with their team members. Several felt that they could really accomplish anything after their summer experience as an orientation leader.

## **Relationships/Connections/Teamwork**

Even in the short timeframe of the orientation program, leaders were able to establish genuine relationships with team members and incoming students. Students learned how to work on a team and adapt their personalities to the team. They also developed lasting connections with both team members and incoming students.

The lasting connection began with the experience of the first session. It's hard to explain to someone who is not in FOAP what happens in FOAP. The team had to count on each other because they were the only ones who knew the experience. One leader said "...once you share that first session, those are the only people who know what's going on in your life. You go home and your parents don't know..." Another said "You try to tell people and no one understands, but these people, they've been through it with you. They understand."

For one leader, "I felt like I came into this knowing I wanted to be a better leader, but at the end I realized more of how to work as a team is actually more important." For one, being on a team helped her develop trust in others.

Before I came here I didn't have a lot of patience working in a large group because I'm like, "If I can do this on my own, then why can't you just let me do it on my own?" So I was definitely proved wrong this summer and I guess I learned more than anything that I can't always do it by myself and that I'm going to need the team to do that. So I definitely learned patience, because when people sometimes didn't hold their end of the bargain, and then some people did, and that taught me also to trust. So I've learned patience and trust more than anything in the group. So that's changed dramatically.

For some of the leaders, they were the line of trust with their fellow teammates and incoming students. One leader said:

One of the main things that I contributed this summer was approachability. I talked to a number of different people. That was one of the things that I was striving for, so I was really glad that I accomplished that. The fact that anyone was comfortable coming to me and talking to me about things, whether it is something they were worried about or something dealing with a team issue.

Another leader, in speaking about one of her teammates, said

...she would come to me, not necessarily with FOAP issues, but a lot of personal issues and say, "What would you do? I'm trying to get this done and I'm to go about doing this a certain way, how would you do it?" I know that she was probably the one that I would talk to the most about that kind of thing. I always feel thankful and almost honored that I'm someone that they trust to talk about their issues or something that they are dealing with. Because I feel like I am able, you know, I do keep those things in confidence and trust is something that is extremely important to me. So I always try to stick to that.

One of the participants, after helping a teammate out, said "...it made me feel like I'm helping her and that we're creating a bond between us, that she can count on me to help her out in a situation if she faces that again."

Connections with incoming students were important to the orientation leaders. Some relationships that developed during the orientation sessions continued even after the sessions ended. One leader said "I have had several students who have just – since their session has ended – they confided in me and I've been able to help them through things that they've dealt with..." One leader said that the connection she made with an incoming student was one of her favorite times during FOAP.

There was a student that was not in my group and this kind of has nothing to do with scheduling or anything like that, but after we were scheduling she looked at another girl – [another leader], and said, "Is someone in that room?" She said, "No." She kind of like ran in there and she was really upset. So I was like, okay, I'll go check on her, make sure everything's okay. I walked in there and she was crying hysterically. I know you heard in debriefing ... like her friend was hit by the bomb in Uganda. She cried to me and that was really challenging because I didn't know how to respond to it. There's no easy way to be like, "Oh, well, it happens for a reason." That just doesn't console anybody. I just sat there and she talked to me, I talked to her and cried with her. They try to teach you how to handle stuff like that, but what it comes down to is you don't know how and that's really hard. But once again, it was one of my favorite times during FOAP because I made that connection with her.

Another participant explained the connections made with incoming students in her group.

I told them that every situation is going to be different but this is how I felt. And so, by the time they walked out of that room they just said, "Thank you." And that was the best feeling in the world. Because I can give them all the general catalog information they

want and read by the books, over and over again ten times, but they're going to learn more from my experiences and those questions that I answered at the end than any books could give them.

The overall bond and support of team members was tremendous throughout the summer.

One leader stated it like this: “When one person falls, everyone else, they pretty much fall because we're a team, we're one. I guess with our skills, we've built each other back up, time and time again.” Others said “...the bond that I feel with my fellow orientation leaders is a bond that I'm never gonna get to feel with anybody else” and “you have personal relationships deeper than just surface level... I think that the dynamic of it changed whenever it became a 24-hour job.”

One participant said “I have really developed deep friendships during FOAP, I will come back to school in a month, and these people are still going to be here.” Another leader said FOAP was worth it because of the relationships made with team members.

I think what makes it worth it was originally I thought it was going to be my relationship with the students that I had but it was getting to know people that I would never put myself in a group with, would've never taken the time to get to know them, and that's what made FOAP worth it for me.

Another said:

I feel like the team, we have this bond or this connection that communication skills don't have to be up to par because they understand what you're saying. We all have the connections that nobody thought would be. Nobody's life is the same. I realized after this that everybody could connect in some way or form.

One leader said

...it's just really cool to see how a team of completely, you know, very opposite people with very completely different personalities all were able to mesh together and use our differences that we had to work together for the cohesive team and be able to share our experiences with the students and help give the students a good head start.

Some orientation leaders felt that their skills were an asset to the team, especially in times when the team needing uplifting. “I always use humor, and that's definitely, I would consider

that a skill. Whenever someone is down or whenever you can see people getting frustrated, I use that to kind of "uplift" the group." Another leader mentioned bringing humor to the team.

I try to say something funny and even though my humor is not anything like hardly anybody else's because I'm really corny and cheesy and stuff but I think it's funny and sometimes I'm laughing at myself; they may laugh at me as well. I think that I bring that to the team.

Others showed their support for team members throughout the sessions when situations arose.

I was leading my group and I was kind of sandwiched in-between two other groups. And [one team member] asked one of her students to be quiet and he made a derogatory attack on her and she didn't hear but I did, and I was able to pull the student aside and say, "Look, we don't do this." And [another team member] was able to say, "We don't do this and you're gonna schedule last today," and after that they were able to tell an administrator about the incident. And the administrator pulled the student aside and said, "Look, these are orientation leaders," in that aspect, we just really watch each other's back. We're always there for each other.

One leader mentioned that she knew her place and when it was time to stand back, she had no problem doing that.

I'm not one of those people who jump into every situation, and it's good for us because a lot of people on the FOAP team are like that. They like to be in control, know what to do next, like, "Here, I'm going to give directions." I'm totally willing to do that but only whenever they need me to do that. So I usually just sit back and observe and if I'm needed, then I jump in. I think that helps.

Going through this experience helped the team grow closer. "I think whenever we had emotional breakdowns or a conflict arise and we had to help each other out, and that's when we really grew closer together." Another leader made this statement about the team. "It's all cheesy and redundant and corny, but I really can be myself. I know that these people are going to like me no matter what." One leader said

...as the sessions went by I felt closer and closer and closer, and we did activities this summer ... where you said a lot, like how you feel about each other. We did that picture experiment and we did another thing that you kind of show the strength of your team and I feel like that helped a lot because knowing the strengths of others, you can bring that out in them."

Another leader mentioned an activity that she felt helped the team. “We do what's called black-out. ... We just open up on a variety of topics. And I feel like that helped us all kind of learn a little bit more about each other, other than what's on the surface.” For one leader,

The best part was being with the team. That was my favorite part, just the orientation leader team, because I didn't expect us at all to get as close as we are now. So it was just really cool to see that develop.

One leader talked about how much he appreciated the FOAP experience.

I appreciate this experience so much because had it not been for this experience, we would not be friends. It really forced us together and forced us to learn about each other and to learn we walked in each other's shoes, if only for six weeks but we did it. I know what he's been through and he knows what I've been through and I really, really truly appreciate the FOAP experience because of that.

Another leader mentioned that the connections she made helped her appreciate getting to know people better. “Being able to make that connection with somebody has really made me appreciate getting to know people better.” One leader sums up FOAP as this:

... the thing that I'm pulling from the summer, the things that are going to stick with me for the longest, is going to be the relationships that I've built up with my teammates, my roommate and things like that. There's the joke, "Oh, you walk out with 19 best friends," but you really kind of do.

The Relationships/Connections/Teamwork theme developed throughout the summer.

Through the experience, they were able to learn to open up and trust each other. They confided in each other throughout the summer on issues that were both related and not related to the orientation program. They have established lasting relationships with team members and orientation students.

### **Experiential Learning**

The orientation program is filled with different experiences. Orientation leaders credit several aspects of what they learned and took from FOAP to the actual experience. The leaders learned and pointed out how they were able to change decisions and situations based on a

previous session experience or after learning from teammates. Overall, one leader said you can't really be prepared for FOAP

...because it goes so much further than the lines of just facilitation. There's also a lot of responsibilities behind the scenes and things like that that I wasn't ready for yet. A lot of responsibility things, a lot of management, just things like that that you don't realize you're gonna learn until you start learning them.

Other leaders talked about how "...it's experience will teach you to do that" and

"... practice makes perfect." "It just constantly changes you. And how it changes you on those levels is completely up to how you receive the experience."

Several leaders mentioned that going through the experience was how they learned best.

One leader used observations of others to adjust her actions. She said she observed how someone treated her and she wanted to treat others the same way. "You pick up on things that they're doing and it makes you feel good so you want to speak to other people like that." Others used the seven sessions to try different techniques and ways to go about improving things.

I tried different things, different sessions, and one session I tried just being more light throughout kind of thing, just kind of walking around the whole time, pointing and doing all kinds of stuff like that that, but I didn't stop for the "W" Policy and I had way more questions that session. So something that I noticed, was, you know, as far as communication is concerned, there is so much more to it than just the verbal, because I could just stand there and talk and talk, and talk. And they won't necessarily receive it as well as if I would stop, you know, give them some kind of physical visual implement that this is important and then move on.

One participant said

... as the sessions went on, you learn it better and better, so by the time you present it for the seventh time; you can recite it without the power point. But also, you got more comfortable with how you presented it. You got in a routine of things and kind of like, you know how to roll with the flow at the end of it.

Another leader said that he constantly worked on improving his presentation.

During the orientation session, the first two sessions, I realized after the sessions were over that there were points in my presentation that there were always questions, so I

would constantly try to change that specific area to see if I could alleviate some of those questions.

One participant used a notecard technique to gather information on how she could improve for the next session. “I give them index cards and I say, “Write one thing that I did really well and one constructive thing that you think I could have done better.” The leader was quite amazed that by the seventh session, she didn’t have any questions after her presentation.

From the first session to I guess, the seventh one, I thought I had great communication skills but I realized how much more I had to grow throughout the process and it definitely ended on a high note for me. Some things that I may have said the first session didn't exactly go through to the students, so I would spend more time trying to explain myself than actually getting through the material all the way. So I've definitely grown with that. The seventh session kind of freaked me out because I would go through my power point and I would say, "All right, does anybody have any questions?" And no one would raise their hand. So I don't know whether it was the students just not responding or the fact that I explained everything in a thorough way and they really didn't have any questions.

One participant said she was glad she experienced a rough session because she felt better prepared for future sessions. “It was just a really rough session. It was my Session 5, and I'm actually glad that I experienced that because I feel like I was better prepared for my further sessions.”

Talking and learning from teammates was a benefit to some leaders. Debrief meetings were a great time for leaders to ask questions and learn from each other.

Every debriefing someone would complain that the students just weren't getting it. It was the same thing with me, they just weren't getting it. So we just had to break that down and we would ask, "What are you saying to them? Are you telling them what they really need or are you just telling them oh, how do you get football tickets?" So, I guess they've definitely grown on it also, probably just as much as I have and more.

Because teammates felt they could trust each other, they leaned on each other for advice in handling situations. These statements overlap with the Relationships/Connections/Teamwork theme.



So in-between times I talked to about eight or nine people about how I should deal with this conflict. And every single person I went to especially on the team, was like, "... Just tell them how it is and you'll be fine. You're confident, you know how to do this, so don't worry." And that made me feel like, "Okay, I can trust them." They're gonna help me out with this, and I can trust them if I know that they're really backing me up.

Another leader mentioned that talking with teammates was more valuable than training.

So I feel like going through, talking to my teammates, stuff like that, I feel like that was the part that helped me, even more than just training, because anybody could have learned the training, so you had to have the actual bonding and that part to have gotten into make yourself a better leader.

Training was a big part of the summer orientation experience because the leaders had several hours of training. However, some leaders felt that trained answers weren't always the best decisions.

Most of my decision making was based either on previous experience or from someone else that I knew closely, personally, their personal experience. The training was more of information we were being given that I kind of referred to with the students. But I think all of the decisions I made, especially like, "I have got to decide what am I going to say to this student in sticky situations." Things that they may ask or they bring up. Definitely, listening to how other orientation leaders have handled similar situations. That had a lot to do with it. Also thinking, "Yeah, I've had this personality type before," and pulling on the knowledge of the personalities that I am dealing with.

Other leaders mentioned that certain aspects of the orientation experience went against the rules of training, but they felt their decisions were right at the time they had to make them.

I knew if they started fighting, I would not be able to break them up and that they were going to get in a lot of serious trouble. It was either a lie, which we've been told in our training you never do. You're never, ever supposed to give false information, but I think that considering the circumstances, a lie would have been better than having the students start to physically get violent with each other. So that is a point where, even though I've had training and I was told not to lie, I think that was the best thing I could do; and the students did go into their room after that and we had no more problems out of them.

Another leader had a situation where a student showed up drunk to his group meeting.

There's like preparation, there's logistics and stuff and we're completely briefed on that. We are completely trained for it, we're ready to handle it, and we're ready to handle door-jam and sticky situations. We're given a machine to fix those things but you can't be robotic in your responses because everything's different. I've had like situations with

a drunk student, door jam with that and a door damaging situation with another ambassador, I would apply such and such. When I went to FOAP, I had a student who was drunk in my group. Well drunk was hungover, and my response would be to another ambassador with my student and I actually found out I liked the student more than my other students, and I'm not sure why. I felt like I was real with him and I really enjoyed that level of realness that I was able to have with a student on a personal level. ... if any ambassador heard my responses to him, like the competition that I had with him, they would have been just flabbergasted, drop, die, dead and take my polo away from me and burn it. But I couldn't react. If I would have reacted to the student the way that they wanted me to, it would just cause a whole mess of problems with the group. I wouldn't have had his respect. He would have caused problems for other students. It would have made scheduling a hassle. It was just easier for me to be real with him and not – just like step back from the polo for a second, to like respond to him. ... I did not see the route that I was given by training with FOAP, leading to that.

Training only takes you so far. One leader talked about a staff member who said training gives you the tools you need to help yourself along the way.

We are going to give you all the tools you need. It's your job to learn how to piece them all together and make an effective team, and make an effective presentation, and be an effective orientation leader. There are gonna be bumps along the way and we're gonna help you fix those but ultimately, you're going to fix it yourself.

One leader went in thinking she was prepared because of training, but she faced situations that were not in the "training book."

And I went into that thinking, "I've had this much training. I'm good, I'm ready." Went into it, still not confident because I knew I didn't know everything, but I didn't get challenged on what I was trained. I got challenged on more of what I haven't done yet in FOAP. It's not until you get stomped with those questions or you get hit with those situations that you're like, "Okay, this isn't in my training book. What do I do?"

Training also caused one leader to be more defensive in situations with students.

I feel like, because of that training, we're very defensive. If a student leaves, you hate that student or something. You don't know, they may have gotten a text that someone's in the hospital, stuff like that, and you don't know what's going on. So decision making, I feel like I use my emotion more than like the textbook answer, which isn't always correct. I feel like we should take each example case by case and not have a script for it almost.

One leader said that the experience will take time to show growth. She believed growth would come with time and reflection after the summer orientation sessions were over.

I think it's through my skills that I'm going to show growth. I don't think I'm going to show growth so much this summer or have shown growth this summer, as I will throughout the school year when I reflect back to it. I mean, maybe I have, and I just don't see it.

### **Role/Future Role in Society**

The summer orientation experience has helped some leaders not only understand and see the importance of their role as a leader and team member, but also to see their future role in society. For some, they had moments where they truly understood the purpose of FOAP and the importance of their role to the university. One leader said she realized that it's all about the students.

This is your student's first FOAP experience. This is their first and last orientation even though it is your third, fourth, fifth. This is their first one. So that really clicked in my head and the whole reason why the FOAP again was for the students and it was not for me at all. So many students were so thankful and that really is why you do it. I feel like I could do this job and not get paid and get the same out of it.

Another leader explained how she was reminded that FOAP was important.

There were a couple of instances where I was reminded that this really was a big deal. These students really were scared, even if they were not leading on to be scared and that what I was doing was really making a difference.

One leader said FOAP was more rewarding for her because she got to experience all aspects of FOAP.

I think it's more rewarding for me than the students because I got to experience how much hard work an orientation leader puts in to make this program get put on and then, I get to see them whenever they really understand something about the university or when they really appreciate what we've done for them through the university.

There were different reasons the students decided to apply for a FOAP leader position.

One went into FOAP for the job experience and ended up coming out with much more.

I was going into this, "This is going to be my job. This is going to be my work. This is how I was going to make money this summer." Not, in any way, shape or form, expect to have made the friendships that I made.

Another leader remembered his experience as an orientation student and wanted to help others have the same type of experience.

And my whole drive for working orientation this summer was that whenever I came through orientation I had a very good orientation leader who really brought out the best in each of us and tried to make sure that we were all involved somehow. I wanted to make sure those students that came through orientation this year had the same experience.

One leader said she understood the reason for so many team-bonding activities. "I understand why they do so many FOAP-ession events where we are forced to spend "fun" time together, bonding. I completely understand that because it really does make a world of difference!" These events focused on cohesion between team members.

The orientation experience also exposed participants to their future role in society. Through this experience, some have been solidified in their future aspirations and others have considered changing majors. One leader felt confident in her major and career path after college, but FOAP has caused her to reflect on that decision and not be afraid to change it.

But now, I guess, coming to college, I'm starting to say, "What concentration do I want to go into? Is this even what I want to do?" So that's one of the hardest decisions I know all college students face. So this is definitely, I guess since that is alleviated my concern about switching over, because if I switch over then I'm going to have to stay another year in school. I don't want to do that. I want to do four years. But I'm not so concerned about it anymore because I've seen people around me and they've told me their stories about how they switched majors two and three times before they even knew what they wanted to do.

One leader ended FOAP knowing that his career path is what he is supposed to be doing in life.

I think through FOAP, it has not only solidified what I want to do with my life but it has also taught me how to instill this leadership quality; not only in ourselves but people around me and how you can bring people closer to you through leadership and through a team. I know after when all these skills that I've learned; patience, decision making, confidence is only going to help me help other people.

Two leaders' perspectives have changed since working FOAP. One said she never realized the work involved with organizing this type of program. Another leader said FOAP was

...completely dedicating my summer to this experience and to this organization, and to this team, and to the university, has really changed my perspective on how much work people put into things to make them happen. It really changed my perspective on how happy I am when I do these things.

The other changed her perspective of herself. “I think for me, this summer has totally changed my perspective on myself and what I want to do. It challenged me personally because I know I can, with confidence be with a group of people.” One participant said FOAP helped him grow. “I feel like I can find what I want in life and I feel like my believing in decisions will help me reach that.” After the orientation sessions, one leader said she was more driven to accomplish things,

I feel like I'm a lot more driven, you know. Whereas, before, I mean I tried in school but I wasn't doing everything I could to be the best student I could be. And I feel like now I'm going to be that student who gets done what I need to get done. Also like I said before, complacency is one of my least favorite things and that's where I was all last year. I was just not really on the fast-track to anywhere. I was just kind of taking things as it came, kind of whatever. Now, I realize I hate that. I feel like I should always constantly be working towards something. So I think we're going to see that a lot more next year when I get to school. All my friends will be like, "Wow, you're actually doing a lot more things." You're getting a lot more involved and stuff like that.

Through the summer, orientation leaders were exposed to several different experiences. Some of these experiences really helped leaders see the importance in what they were doing as an orientation leader. Others have contemplated future career changes because of their experience as an orientation leader.

### **Composite Thematic Textural Structural Representation**

The composite thematic textural structural representation depicts the personal development of orientation leaders working the summer orientation program. At the core of the figure is the personal development of orientation leaders. The themes are interrelated, and there is potential for overlapping between themes.

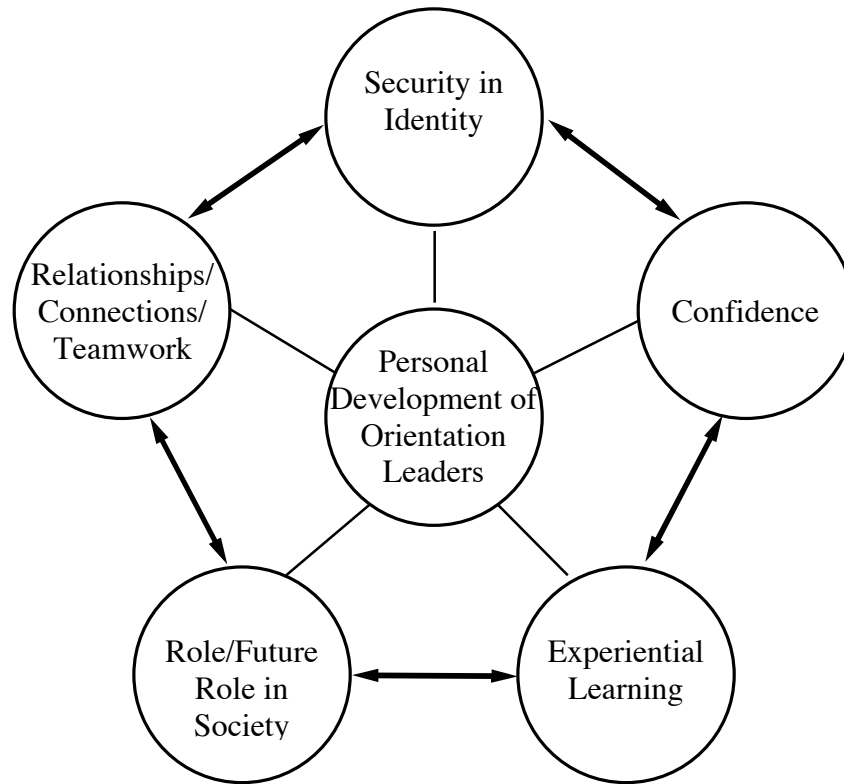


Figure 4: Composite thematic textural structural representation of personal development of orientation leaders

#### **Objective Four**

Objective four was to identify themes from additional data collection strategies that supplement objective three results. The researcher gathered this data through a one-on-one interview with the orientation team leader and focus group interviews held with the same 11 participants from one-on-one interviews. The orientation team leader interview was held three days after one-on-one interviews were completed. The focus groups were held four months after the summer orientation program ended. The researcher split up the groups by gender. There was one focus group with three males and two focus groups of females. One group had three females, and the other group had five females. The researcher also collected data through observations held during debriefing sessions at the end of day one and day two of each session. As in objective three, the results of this objective were achieved utilizing a phenomenological

research philosophy. Moustakas (1994) believed a phenomenology is concerned with how things appear. The added value from the team leader interview, focus group interviews, and researcher observations provided depth and richness to the results of the study. Moustakas (1994) also stated that a phenomenological research philosophy is concerned with approaching analysis from different angles and perspectives. This objective provides a unique perspective to the qualitative findings in objective three.

After rereading and listening to the orientation team leader interview and focus group videos several times, I compiled the statements and examples that added a deeper and richer understanding to the research study. Notes from observations were also compiled with this data. Some statements provided support to the composite thematic textural representation of personal development of orientation leaders. Other statements formed additional themes of the impact a summer orientation program had on the personal development of orientation leaders. The findings in this objective include both the supportive elements to the composite thematic textural representation of personal development of orientation leaders and the additional themes that emerged from the analysis. The objective concludes with a final representation of the impact a summer orientation program had on personal development of orientation leaders.

### **Security in Identity**

Security in identity was definitely enhanced since the orientation program ended. Students shared how they felt more comfortable with themselves and were not concerned with changing for others. Since FOAP ended, leaders felt confident and comfortable in a room full of fellow leaders, as well as in a room full of strangers. One particular example included a leader's description of now having the assurance to walk into a room and not be afraid to sit on the front row or introduce himself to the person sitting next to him. Had it not been for FOAP, one leader

wouldn't have been able to open up and be confident in who he was. Leaders learned that they don't always have to be the best or the only person that fulfills a role. They have become more humble in accepting decisions and understanding that other leaders may be more appropriate to accomplish a certain task.

As the researcher, I observed a change in security in identity from the first session debriefing meeting to the last session debriefing meeting. Leaders were more comfortable with themselves and sharing concerns with the group. They took into account others' opinions, but weren't afraid to share their own views. Several leaders mentioned that they were comfortable in themselves and came to understand who they were at the end of the summer.

### **Confidence**

Areas of confidence continued after FOAP. Several aspects of confidence coincide with security in identity. FOAP allowed orientation leaders to gain tremendous experience speaking in front of groups. The confidence to speak in front of groups was evident in the team leader interview, focus group meetings, and in my own observations.

The leaders were placed in situations where they had to "break the ice" all summer. Walking into a room and having to start a conversation was part of their role as an orientation leader. Since FOAP, they mentioned not being nervous walking in a room anymore. They are comfortable speaking in front of groups. They are confident among both professionals and peers. They feel more confident in their abilities to communicate effectively. Several leaders claim FOAP allowed them to learn how to be more proactive in decision making. They don't get as nervous in situations because they have learned how to "roll with the punches" and think quickly on their feet. One leader had an entire training planned out that required changing 10 minutes before the session started. If it had not been for FOAP, she wouldn't have been able to



think as quickly on her feet and make the necessary adjustments to maintain a successful training session.

As an observer throughout the summer, I witnessed several instances where leaders described examples when they had to stand up and take charge. Although it might have been intimidating at first, they learned how to take control of situations and handle them appropriately.

### **Relationships/Connections/Teamwork**

Several leaders spoke about the bond that was made with the FOAP team during the summer and how that continued after FOAP ended. For some, they said that the length of time of a relationship does not dictate the closeness of a relationship. The intensity of the program and the idea of forcing individuals to work together allowed them to break down walls and connect with each other. Becoming more comfortable with each other allowed some leaders to open up more than they expected. It forced the team members to be real with each other. You can't hide who you are after living with people for an entire summer. Leaders were exposed to team members with different personalities and different beliefs, so they had to learn how to work and cooperate with each other.

There was a family connection made with the individuals that serve on the FOAP team. Even after the summer ended, they still spent time together because they shared important moments. FOAP embraced challenging and emotional times that were both professional and personal. The orientation leaders were the only ones who understood the process, and they leaned on each other for support.

Opening up and sharing personal information was a big step for several leaders during the summer. One leader, in particular, said that she had used the FOAP experience of opening up to others as a means of growing closer relationships with friends and family members.

Another leader attributed her close relationships with team members to an attainment of completeness because she was able to open up and be herself.

Balancing and learning through relationships during the summer was a challenge for some leaders. Since friends and family members didn't really understand the extensiveness of FOAP, it was hard to relate situations from FOAP to others. Some leaders felt that they learned how to balance those relationships outside of FOAP. Others felt that they learned how to be more accepting of others at the end of FOAP. When in training, one of the focused aspects is handling uncomfortable situations. There are certain ways leaders are trained in reacting to situations. Some leaders have come to realize that it's not always right to have an automatic judgment on someone because they react in a certain way. This has allowed leaders to be more open-minded to others and not be as judgmental. It's something, they claim, you have to learn from experience.

### **Experiential Learning**

Learning through experience was different for each leader. During the focus group meetings, participants were asked to relate FOAP to the stages of Kolb's experiential learning model (i.e. concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) (Kolb, 1984). Some leaders mentioned that they looked at the entire experience as one concrete experience. One leader commented that she felt she was still in the reflecting stage at the point of focus groups. She noticed changes in herself throughout the summer, and as changes occurred she was able to reflect back on the summer and understand what caused them. Other leaders said that sessions served their own cycle, but reflections may have not happened after each session because some weeks had back-to-back sessions. Although

they didn't see certain phases as structured, they certainly agreed that there were aspects of each phase throughout the sessions.

Leaders felt that they found their rhythm of what was effective after around the third or fourth sessions. Leaders may have tried different techniques or icebreakers in the first few sessions, but then relied on what worked for the final sessions. They definitely noted a difference in themselves from session one to session seven. This was evidenced in debriefings as well as with conversations with the team leader. I noticed how the questions that were asked in later sessions were not as picky and specific. Students really seemed to find their groove after the first few sessions. They appeared more at ease during discussions and not as quick to make comments or judgments.

One aspect that had quite a bit of discussion was the debriefing meetings, which related to Kolb's abstract conceptualization phase. For some, debriefing meetings were rather monotonous and boring. For others, they really enjoyed the time to reflect and speak about concerns and situations. They felt that they benefited from the times they were asked to write down thoughts and speak their mind. Some claimed that their "abstract conceptualization" phase was speaking to one or two teammates on their own time and seeking advice that way.

Leaders were able to relate the experiential learning cycle to things outside of FOAP. For example, leaders served in different roles in different organizations, and they were able to relate to the reflective observation and abstract conceptualization phases when working through experiences.

### **Role/Future Role in Society**

When asked if they would consider applying for an orientation leader position for the following summer, some claimed they would apply again. The main reason would be to do it

again for the students. Some realized how important a role they had after the summer was over. They recognized the lives that were impacted from serving in the orientation leader role, and they gained a better understanding of the work involved to put on the orientation program.

Several leaders said FOAP gave them the confidence to apply for another organization's leadership role. They are able to use the FOAP experience in job interviews and relate back to what they learned from the experience. One leader applied for a role within her organization and now feels assured in her future role as an educator once she graduates. She made the connection to her role as an orientation leader and the impact that experience had on what she wants to do in life. Another leader was presented with an opportunity to serve in a leadership role within an organization. She felt the confidence and skills she gained would be beneficial for the new role.

Career decisions are extremely important for college students. For several orientation leaders, FOAP either solidified career decisions or caused some to think about career changes. One leader had the opportunity to work with incoming students within her major and said that she is absolutely sure that her career path is what she wants to do. On the opposite end, another leader thought from a young age that she had the exact plan for her life figured out. Since FOAP, she has made a complete change and desires to go into the field of education. FOAP helped another orientation leader really think about her career aspirations and she, too is debating about switching to the field of education. One leader, because of a relationship built with an administrator during FOAP, was presented with a potential job opportunity upon graduation. This leader would have never developed that relationship if she had not worked FOAP.

### **Additional Themes**

Subcomponents of several themes emerged from the focus groups. The security in identity and confidence themes combined to offer additional opportunities to orientation leaders.

The current and future roles theme extended to the role of a student. Added opportunities and benefits due to the involvement with the orientation program were presented months after the program ended.

Coming to understand who you are is an important lesson to learn. For one leader, he was able to grasp his identity and remain comfortable with that during FOAP. After FOAP, he was able to share his identity with a large group of people and serve in a role that he would have never imagined to fill. He attributed what he learned and the comfort level he had achieved to the FOAP experience. Another leader mentioned that FOAP has helped her develop her full personality. Her team members were the first people to really see her true self, and she reached a sense of completeness after the summer.

One leader used the FOAP experience and the confidence she gained to apply for a job. While she may have still applied had she not worked FOAP, she felt very secure in her abilities because of the exposure and plethora of experiences she faced during the summer. She also felt confident going into an interview because she knew she could use the experiences from FOAP when answering questions.

Some leaders mentioned that they started off rather confident in their abilities at the beginning of FOAP. Throughout FOAP, they noticed changes in others, but really didn't see anything in themselves. At the focus group meeting, these leaders were able to share that after looking back on FOAP and themselves four months after FOAP, they really have gained more confidence in themselves. They attributed that confidence to the experiences they had during the summer.

Maintaining professionalism in every aspect of a student's college career is vital. One leader was struggling in a class and sent an e-mail to his professor. The professor was very

impressed with the leader's professionalism in communication that he offered guidance to the student. Had the leader not worked FOAP, he would have approached the professor in a more immature fashion and would have probably not received a positive response from the professor. FOAP showed him that it is important to remain respectful and composed when communicating concerns. Another leader has come to understand that adaptability is part of life. He was not meeting a professor's expectations and felt that his grade did not reflect his work. Instead of disrespecting the professor, he learned to accept the professor's critiques and adapt his work to meet the professor's expectations.

Some leaders have used the skills they gained and applied them to the responsibilities as a student. For example, one leader feels she is more organized and efficient in completing tasks. She attributed this change to working as an orientation leader. Other leaders claimed to be more assertive in organizational meetings. In FOAP, there was always the attitude of getting things done. Since FOAP, leaders find themselves wanting to accomplish more and waste less time in completing tasks. They believe they speak up more and try to get ideas resolved quicker.

Several orientation leaders were placed to lead a group of incoming students within their own college major. For some, they developed very strong relationships with professional staff members and counselors in their college during the summer. One leader said he was on the waiting list for a class and ran into his counselor from the summer. Just in conversation, he mentioned being on the waiting list, and the counselor immediately resolved the situation and placed him in the class. Had it not been for FOAP, he would not have developed a close relationship with the counselor that enabled him to be added to a class. Another leader, because of her relationship with the counselor in her college over the summer, was able to schedule rather

quickly and effortlessly. The counselor knew who she was and trusted her judgments, so she didn't have to have an extensive meeting prior to scheduling classes for the next semester.

When asked if anyone has noticed a change in their development since FOAP ended, several leaders indicated that both parents and friends that were not part of FOAP had mentioned changes in communication and involvement. Some leaders mentioned that their friends now come to them to help resolve conflicts. For example, one leader had a roommate that was working through a conflicting situation. The roommate confided in the leader to help resolve the conflict because she had experienced remaining calm and collected during intense moments. Because of FOAP, she knew how to be more diplomatic and respectful in handling situations.

Some leaders commented that they have taken the skills and lessons they learned from FOAP and applied them in current job responsibilities. Some feel that their supervisors give them more responsibilities because they can handle it. Others have used the communication and planning skills they gained in their work settings. Leaders feel that they hold themselves to a higher standard and hold other organizations, professors, and classes to higher standards. They learned how to manage so much in a short time frame that they feel the need to stay driven and motivated in current tasks.

Below is the final representation of the impact a summer orientation program had on personal development of orientation leaders. The all-encompassing figure depicts the themes that emerged from immediate impact of the program (security in identity, confidence, relationships/connections/teamwork, experiential learning, and current and future role) and the extended impact of the program (identity and confidence, relationships – personal and professional, role – student, orientation leader, career, experiential learning, added benefits and opportunities).

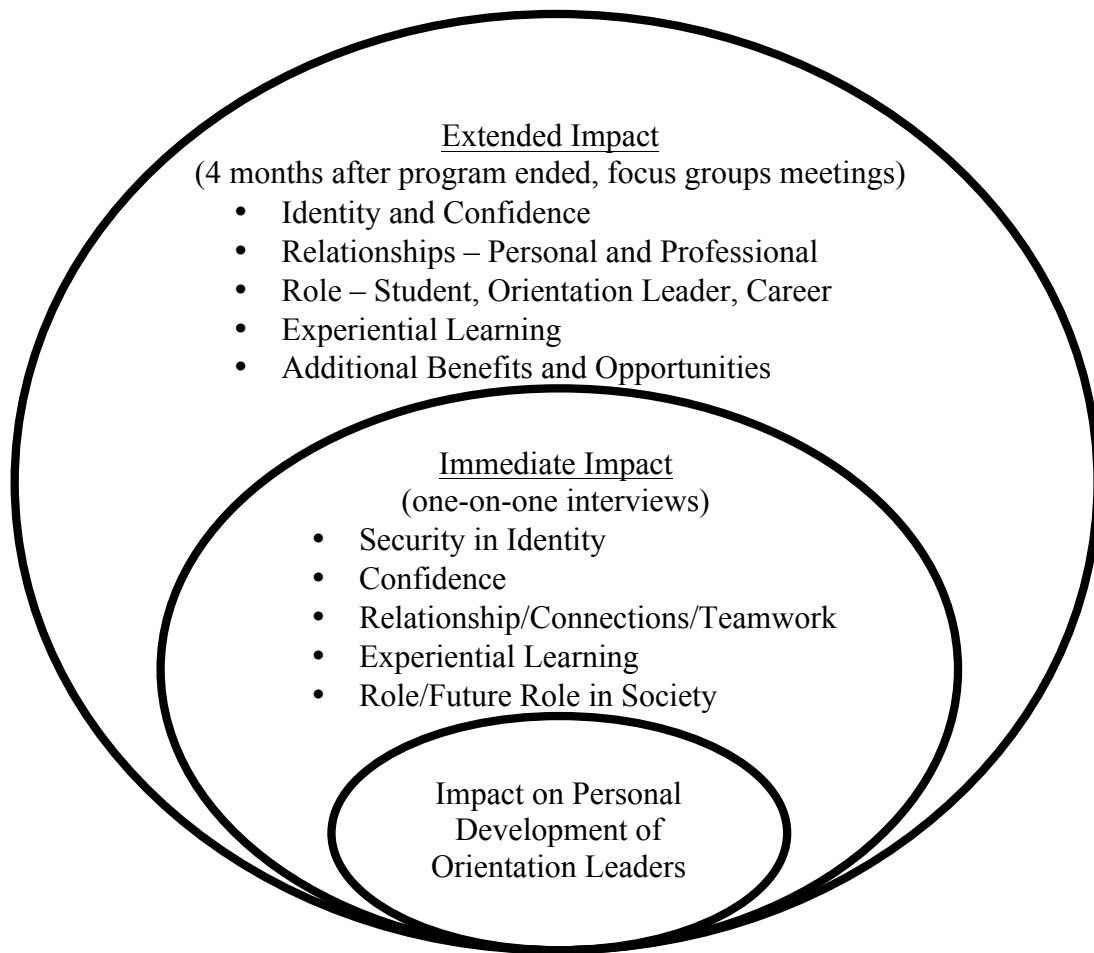


Figure 5: Final representation of the impact on personal development of orientation leaders from working a summer orientation program



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter presents a summary of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact a summer orientation program has on the personal development of orientation leaders at a research university (very high research activity as classified by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) in the southern United States (Carnegie, 2010). This study followed a mixed methods design, which includes a blended approach of both quantitative and qualitative components (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This study was sequential in nature as one phase was used to select participants in a subsequent phase. (Ary et al., 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

#### **Summary of Findings**

##### **Objective One**

Findings in objective one indicated that the majority of the participants in the study were female ( $n = 15$ , 78.9%). The largest group of participants were 19 years old ( $n = 13$ , 68.4%), and the age range of participants included 18 to 21. College majors of the participants were very diverse. There were only a few majors that had more than one leader in that major. These included psychology with three participants (16.0%), elementary education with two participants (10.8%) and kinesiology with two participants (18.8%). The father's highest education level completed at the time the pre-questionnaire was distributed ranged from High School/GED to doctoral degree. For mother's highest education level completed at the time the pre-questionnaire was distributed ranged from High School/GED to Master's degree.

## Objective Two

Findings in objective two revealed the overall pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire scores of skill development as measured by the researcher-designed Self-Assessed Personal Development Instrument. The pre-questionnaire mean score was 148.47 with a standard deviation of 11.10. Post-questionnaire mean score was 169.74 with a standard deviation of 11.16. Table 6 in chapter four presented a breakdown of mean, standard deviation, and category of every instrument question on the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire. An interpretive scale of 1 - 1.75 = SD (Strongly Agree), 1.76 - 2.50 = D (Disagree), 2.51 - 3.25 = A (Agree), 3.26 - 4.0 = SA (Strongly Agree) was used to categorize each statement on the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire. The largest number of statements ( $n = 33$ , 64.6%) were categorized as Agree on the pre-questionnaire and Strongly Agree on the post-questionnaire. Eleven statements (22.9%) remained consistent with Strongly Agree on both the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire. Four statements (8.3%) remained consistent with Agree on both the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire. One statement (Comfortable giving feedback to others) was categorized as Disagree on the pre-questionnaire and Strongly Agree on the post-questionnaire. Another statement (Hesitant to make decisions) changed categories going from Disagree on the pre-questionnaire to Agree on the post-questionnaire.

Further analysis was conducted using ANOVA and revealed that there were no significant differences between males and females when compared to the post-questionnaire scores. There were also no significant differences when comparing age categories to overall post-questionnaire scores. There were, however, differences in post-questionnaire scores when comparing both father's highest education level completed and mother's highest level of

education completed. The dependent samples T-test yielded a statistically significant difference in pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire total scores ( $t = -9.280, p = .05$ ).

Implications from these results suggest that participants did develop a change in skills assessed from working the summer orientation program. Although we are uncertain if the results are consistent because of Howard's response shift bias, there is potential for development from serving as an orientation leader.

### **Objective Three**

Findings in objective three presented a qualitative depiction and representation of the personal development gained by orientation leaders as a result of working the summer orientation program. This objective was achieved using the modification of the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). The themes that emerged from the one-on-one interview data included security in identity, confidence, relationships/connections/teamwork, experiential learning, and current and future role.

Throughout the summer orientation experience, orientation leaders became more comfortable within themselves and their abilities. They became more trusting of themselves and in their decision making. For some leaders, they claimed to have found themselves and who they want to be in life. This security in identity also transferred into relationships with incoming students and teammates.

Confidence is an overarching theme that was prevalent from the orientation program. Leaders were placed in several different situations where they grew in decision-making skills and learned how to handle intense circumstances. These situations ranged from working with unique personalities of group members to managing upset parents. Leaders were faced with questions that they did not know how to answer, and they had to think quickly and support their

decisions. Overall, there was a personal development in confidence, even if leaders felt confident at the beginning of the summer. The experience presented opportunities to open up and learn how to trust yourself and others.

The bond between the orientation leaders was very unique. Because they were the only individuals who understood the process and the intensity of the program, they had to lean on each other for advice, help, and strength. They learned how to be team players and bring their strengths out on the team. Several orientation leaders made connections with incoming students. They were able to relate to students in their groups and share personal stories. Generally speaking, there was an appreciation for the FOAP experience because several leaders would not have made the friendships they made with their teammates had it not been for the experience that prompted them to learn how to work together.

Learning to work with individuals of different backgrounds and beliefs is important in every phase of life. Whether these participants pursue careers in a team environment or not, they will be faced with situations where they have to work with others. What was gained during the summer orientation experience can be transferred into any line of work.

Experiential learning was another theme that emerged from the data analysis. If it weren't for the number of sessions that orientation leaders had the opportunity to work, there wouldn't have been the same type of development that happened. Each session presented its own unique mix of situations and circumstances that called for certain types of attention. Some leaders started off the summer with a great session, and others had to work through some difficult instances in their first sessions. The idea of learning from experience was demonstrated time and time again throughout the summer. Leaders mentioned that you can't prepare for

everything. There are times when you have to learn it when you do it. Training can only prepare you for so much with this type of experience.

The final theme was the understanding about the current role as an orientation leader along with a leader's future role in society. For some, this experience enhanced their career decisions and solidified plans for their lives. For others, this experience allowed them to see different perspectives and opportunities for life. Some have made a commitment to change their major and go into a field where they feel their personalities and abilities fit.

Implications from these results suggest that students may not really know what they want to major in at the time when they are faced to make such a decision. Providing experiential learning opportunities and activities allows individuals to see those aspects of job responsibilities that they want to pursue. If universities provide more opportunities for development during a student's college career, students may decide and stick to their major at the point of making that decision. It is possible to look at linking experiences like the summer orientation program to student retention.

#### **Objective Four**

Four months after the summer orientation program ended, focus group meetings were held with the 11 participants who completed one-on-one interviews. Themes from objective three were further enhanced with the data collected from focus groups, and additional themes emerged. In addition to focus groups, a one-on-one interview was held with the orientation team leader, and observations made by the researcher throughout the summer were used to compile the results in objective four.

Identity and confidence were combined as one theme in this objective. The leaders really gained an understanding of who they were and the confidence to accept and be proud of that

after the FOAP experience. Leaders gained personal and professional relationships with individuals they would have never considered knowing if it were not for FOAP. Looking back through the FOAP experience, there was an appreciation for the role of an orientation leader, the time involved to make a successful orientation program, and an added understanding of expectations once fulfilling the role of an orientation leader. Some leaders felt that they held themselves to higher standards, and others felt that their supervisors and co-workers held them to higher standards since working the orientation program. The experience of FOAP is where the leaders gained the most about themselves and others. Several times, leaders mentioned the idea of learning how to handle something when you are faced with it for real. Training can cover the basics, but learning really happens from the experience. Each leader looked at Kolb's experiential learning cycle differently. Some felt the orientation program was one big process, and others thought each session was its own cycle. Still others mentioned that the summer was one complete concrete experience and they were in the reflecting stage at the time of focus group meetings.

Several leaders mentioned added benefits and opportunities that arose because of working as an orientation leader. Some developed lasting relationships with counselors and professors in their college and were able to ask for and receive assistance under different circumstances. Other leaders developed professional relationships that presented potential job opportunities in their field of study. Relationships with peers changed over the summer for several leaders. Some said their friends confided in them and asked for their advice more because of the different situations they faced during summer orientation. Others developed more positive relationships with friends and colleagues within their organization. This allowed for a more cohesive team and work environment within their organizations.

Overall, leaders developed in so many different aspects during the summer. Even after working the summer orientation program, differences were noted with leaders. As a staff member who works closely with the summer orientation program, I witnessed several leaders in different roles the subsequent summer. Leaders continued to show confidence in their roles, even those who are serving in different capacities with the summer orientation program. They appeared more professional in handling situations, and they remained calm and comfortable within themselves.

Implications from the follow up focus group meetings suggest that development of students may not be instantaneous. Students need time to reflect on such a hectic summer experience. At their age, participants may not really understand the changes that occurred. Some didn't see changes until others pointed them out.

### **Meta-inference Process**

The most important process in a mixed methods study is the inference process. Teddlie and Tashakkori described the meta-inference process as a means of merging both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the data (2009). The inference process entails both inference quality, which refers to the quality of data, design, and analysis, and inference transferability, which refers to conclusions being applied to multiple settings and populations (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The mixed methods research design used in this study combines the strength of both quantitative and qualitative strands, and strives to minimize the weaknesses in each (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). After a thorough analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative findings separately, the researcher merges the two strands together to provide a better understanding of the research problem.

The quantitative data in this study provided some very insightful information to the researcher. After analyzing each statement from the instrument individually and providing an interpretive scale to both the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire mean scores, several comments coincided with statements from the qualitative strand. A few comments showed little or no change from pre-questionnaire to post-questionnaire mean scores. For example, leaders considered their skills of speaking with enthusiasm in front of a group, making eye contact when speaking to a group or individuals, showing genuine interest in others, being approachable and respectful, considerate of others in decision making, eager to acquire knowledge, and open-minded strong in both pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire mean scores. From the qualitative strand, this speaks to the themes of security in identity, confidence, and relationships/connections/teamwork. Even though the mean scores showed little or no change, there was definitely personal development in these areas with the orientation leaders.

Other questions from the instrument did show a change from agree to strongly agree on the interpretive scale. These statements, specifically listen patiently, ask questions for clarity, get my point across the first time I present, adapt to the level of detail to match the audience, and make adjustments to presentation when necessary, were evident in the data collected through interviews and focus groups. Leaders learned from session to session how to be a more effective leader and presenter. They were exposed to different situations where they had to make adjustments and get their point across accordingly.

Teamwork skills were enhanced and shown in both the quantitative and qualitative strands. Comparing pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire mean scores, several statements showed an increased mean score from agree to strongly agree on the interpretive scale. Specifically, statements included working effectively when required to be flexible, adjusting



responses based on cues from others, maintaining flexibility when interacting with a group, keeping composure under difficult circumstances, readily adapting to change, and coping effectively with stress. Throughout the summer experience, orientation leaders faced several challenges and learned how to work through them. There were instances where leaders had to adapt to changes with team members, parents, incoming students, and staff members. These statements correspond with the themes of confidence, relationships/connections/teamwork, and experiential learning.

From a decision making standpoint, scores from the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire instrument showed increases from agree to strongly agree using the interpretive scale. Some of these statements included not being afraid to ask tough questions, maintaining confidence in decisions, trusting their ability to solve difficult problems, and handling a wide variety of problems. Leaders gained the confidence in themselves to be honest with who they were and what they were trying to do. They spoke about learning how to trust themselves more in handling situations. This was apparent in one-on-one interviews and in focus groups and connects to the themes of security in identity and confidence.

There were two statements from the instrument that resulted in unique scores. One statement, comfortable giving feedback to others, changed from disagree in pre-questionnaire mean scores to strongly agree in post-questionnaire mean scores. I attribute this change in mean scores to the overall aspects of teamwork and trust. Orientation leaders lived with their teammates throughout the summer, and there were times that they were the only ones that knew what the other members were going through. This connection led to leaders being able to trust each other and share personal moments. The confidence they gained in themselves transferred into their relationships with each other. They confided in each other and trusted the opinions of

their teammates. Another statement from the instrument changed from agree on the pre-questionnaire mean scores to disagree on the post-questionnaire mean scores. This statement, hesitant to make decisions, makes sense with the one-on-one interview and focus group data. Orientation leaders were faced with making spontaneous decisions throughout the summer. There were times when they did not have a long time to think about options. Some made decisions based on their gut feelings, and others used examples from training or other team members to make decisions.

While the inference process involves overlapping the quantitative and qualitative strands, there were some aspects gathered from the qualitative strand that were never mentioned in the quantitative component. These themes of current and future role and additional benefits and opportunities from serving as an orientation leader manifested during one-on-one interviews and focus group meetings. Participants gathered an appreciation and understanding of the time and effort involved with the orientation program. Some took the summer experience to make decisions on changing majors. Others developed relationships with administrators that opened up potential future job opportunities.

Overall, participants developed both personally and professionally through serving in the role as orientation leader. They developed skills that can be transferred across curriculums and careers. Leaders also established lasting relationships and experiences that can also be beneficial to future goals and aspirations. Results from this study have potential for transferability to similar experiences, even those outside of the orientation realm.

### **Conclusions**

After an extensive review of literature combined with a mixed methodological research design, a solid conclusion can be made that the summer orientation program had a positive

impact on the orientation leaders. Furthermore, comparable results from this study are found in the literature. Kolb's experiential learning model was the initial framework used for this study. Throughout the data analysis portion of the study, the added components of themes from Chickering's seven vectors model of student development emerged and were included in the review of literature.

Like Mann (1998), several leaders in this study showed personal growth and development throughout the summer. The summer orientation experience allowed leaders to learn how to manage small groups and work through conflicting situations. Professional and personal relationships developed throughout the summer and extended into the following fall semester. Branch et al. (2003) and Mann (1998) both reported participants developing networking skills with administrators and increased communication skills. Specifically in this study, participants mentioned relationships that proved to be beneficial both in current academic instances and in future opportunities.

Several studies that utilized Kolb's experiential learning model served to parallel findings in this study. Gardner and Korth (1997) and Machtmes et al. (2009) found that students were provided practical experience that could be transferred to the workplace. Orientation leaders in this study commented that the summer orientation experience would be beneficial in future careers. Students learned from real-world experiences. Several leaders noted that they used the summer orientation experience in different roles since the summer orientation experience ended. Some claim experience gained from FOAP has transferred to their roles in other student organizations. Others have been able to take what was learned from summer orientation to their existing employment positions both on and off campus. In this study, leaders mentioned an appreciation for the role as an orientation leader along with an appreciation for the time and

necessary involvement needed to complete the responsibilities of the summer orientation program. This gratitude for the role and the program coincide with Abdulwahed and Nagy's (2009) study that stated participants gained an appreciation for the field in their academic area. Additionally, Carlson (1998) mentioned some students' decisions to change majors and minors. In this study, some leaders did report wanting to change their major and pursue a different academic path for future careers. Personal confidence was an overarching theme found in this study. Similar research (Carlson, 1998; Kaul & Pratt, 2010; Stoke-Eley, 2007) stated that students, after being exposed to a study using Kolb's experiential learning model as a framework, claimed to be more confident both personally and in speaking in front of groups.

Themes that emerged from the data correspond with Chickering's seven-vector model of student development. According to Chickering (2000), each student develops differently and not all students experience each vector at the same time. Participants in this study showed development in each of the vectors, but some showed more development than others in certain vectors. Leaders developed a competence in themselves as in vector one and this very similarly relates to vector five of establishing identity and vector seven of developing integrity. Students became more comfortable in who they were and learned to accept themselves in the company of others. This aspect of development parallels to vector three of moving through autonomy toward interdependence. Through the experience, leaders gained confidence in their decision-making skills. As the summer progressed, students learned to trust themselves and became more independent. Being involved on a team and living with team members presented opportunities for students to learn how to manage relationships. Chickering (2000) stated that part of student development involves vector two, managing emotions, and vector four, developing mature interpersonal relationships. Several leaders commented that the team aspect was the most

beneficial part of FOAP. Leaders developed relationships with their teammates, and they felt confident that these relationships would last. Vector six, developing purpose, corresponds to the above-mentioned literature regarding students' aspirations for future careers. Through FOAP, some leaders decided that the career path they selected fit their goals and others decided to change academic majors and minors. The exposure of FOAP allowed orientation leaders to see all aspects of practical real-world experiences.

### **Recommendations**

Results in the current study showed that the orientation program had a positive impact on the personal development of orientation leaders. Both the quantitative and qualitative components revealed growth in personal development. The orientation program provides an important function for incoming students with their transition to college, and orientation leaders play a vital role in this process.

Recommendations include:

- University orientation program leaders continue to emphasize team bonding and cohesiveness throughout the summer orientation process and program. Leaders are limited in support from individuals outside of the program because few people understand the scope and role of an orientation leader. Reliance on each other creates an encouraging environment.
- University orientation program leaders should rely on training as a tool and resource, but trust leaders to make decisions in circumstances. Training in some situations has potential to create an automatic response before the situation is fully understood.

- A mixed methods design of studies with this population provides a rich understanding of the research question. Future studies should encompass both quantitative and qualitative components.
- A longitudinal study allows researchers to observe the long-term effects a program has on individuals. Results are not always instantaneous and as researchers, we cannot expect individuals to fully understand their development at the immediate conclusion of the program.

It is evident from the study that certain characteristics of the orientation program are significant to orientation leaders. It is important for leaders to understand their role as an orientation leader and its importance to the university. The team dynamic is important as orientation leaders lean on each other for support and encouragement. Because of the intensity of moving in and living with a team of strangers for six weeks, cohesiveness serves as a key element. Leaders grew closer to each other and learned more about each other. For some, they would have never developed the depth in relationships had it not been for the orientation program. For many, they came into the program not very familiar with any team members.

This program has shown how leaders developed and blossomed into mature individuals. They faced tremendous challenges and were exposed to several circumstances that helped them learn life skills. No matter what career path they choose, the lessons they learned as an orientation leader will transfer into any field. As the researcher, I was thoroughly impressed at the maturity level that developed during the summer.

For future studies, a mixed methods approach is highly recommended. Although the quantitative results revealed a significant difference in pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire scores, rich data was also gathered from the qualitative components. Individuals the age of

participants in the study can't always express an accurate self-rating. As mentioned in chapter three, Howard (1980) speaks of response-shift bias as a contamination of self-report instruments. As a future recommendation, I would continue to include the quantitative component, but distribute the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire at the same time of the study. If participants are given two copies of the same instrument at the same time and asked to fill the first one in as a self-report of where they started and fill the second one in as a self-report of where they ended, the researcher would have a more consistent scale for pre and post scores. There is also the possibility of using the data from this study to enhance the instrument for future studies. There were themes that emerged from the qualitative strands that were not included in the initial instrument. It may be beneficial to make adjustments to the instrument and include some of these aspects.

Critical thinking and problem solving skills may also be areas of interest included in future studies and instruments. Participants faced several challenges, and they didn't always respond according to the specific responses given in training. They had to think through decisions and be able to stick with those decisions.

Another aspect to keep in mind when conducting research on this particular age group is that growth may not happen until after a program concludes. For example, some leaders in this study spoke about how they did not see changes in themselves until after the FOAP summer ended and into the following semester. Had I not followed up with focus group interviews, I would have never gathered that important data. A longitudinal study, perhaps for a full year, would bring more rich data and conclusions to a study. As a staff member who is very involved in the orientation process, I have noticed increased development in leaders even a year after the

program concluded. Some leaders appear even more comfortable in their professional role than they mentioned from focus groups.

Training is an important facet of the orientation program, but it is evident that there are some aspects that need adjusting. While it is important to understand protocol and policy, every situation that can be encountered cannot be trained on. Some leaders felt that they were more defensive because of training. They were trained with automatic responses to situations rather than looking at the entire situation before making a decision. Training needs to be used as a guide, but leaders need to be trusted by administrators and staff members in their decision-making skills. Training is used as a tool and resource, but leaders need to trust themselves in situations they encounter during orientation sessions.

Constant communication as a team is important for the orientation leaders. Debriefing meetings were held at the end of each day of orientation. These meetings were used to answer questions and discuss different situations. Activities were incorporated into these meetings to give leaders opportunities to reflect and discuss their experiences.

Colleges and universities continue to research and create out-of-the-classroom opportunities for students to gain real-world experience. The summer orientation program is a prime example of an out-of-the-classroom opportunity. Higher education institutions need to continue to offer these types of opportunities for students and understand that development extends beyond the length of the program. Additional ways to utilize these types of opportunities is through service-learning activities. Service learning provides students with opportunities to develop within real-world experiences.

Results in this study were consistent across the two phases of the mixed methods design. The objectives were discussed thoroughly between quantitative and qualitative phases, followed



by meta-inferences. Findings in this study may be useful for administrators who work summer orientation programs. Findings may also be transferable to any other areas within education that utilize a student role within a real-world experience.

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## APPENDIX: SELF-ASSESSED PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Please use the following scale to indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the descriptors of your leadership,

	1	2	3	4
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I speak with enthusiasm in front of a group of people.	1	2	3	4
2. I listen patiently without interrupting the person talking to me.	1	2	3	4
3. I articulate my words when giving a presentation to a group of people.	1	2	3	4
4. I ask questions to clarify other people's point of view.	1	2	3	4
5. I listen willingly to other people's concerns.	1	2	3	4
6. I make eye contact when I speak to a group of people.	1	2	3	4
7. I get my point across the first time I present information to a group of people.	1	2	3	4
8. I listen carefully to questions that individuals ask me.	1	2	3	4
9. I adapt the level of detail to match the needs of my audience.	1	2	3	4
10. I make eye contact when I listen to others.	1	2	3	4
11. I speak confidently in front of a group of people.	1	2	3	4
12. I connect with my audience during presentations.	1	2	3	4
13. I accurately interpret nonverbal body language when speaking with people.	1	2	3	4
14. I am able to make adjustments during a presentation when necessary.	1	2	3	4
15. I demonstrate genuine interest when listening to others.	1	2	3	4
16. I display nonverbal behaviors that show I care about your concerns.	1	2	3	4
17. I am approachable.	1	2	3	4
18. I work effectively when required to be flexible.	1	2	3	4
19. I can adjust my response based on cues from others.	1	2	3	4
20. I am patient when working in a group.	1	2	3	4
21. I am a conversationalist.	1	2	3	4
22. I relate well to people regardless of their personality or background.	1	2	3	4

23. I am flexible when interacting with a group.	1	2	3	4
24. I treat people with respect.	1	2	3	4
25. I keep my composure under difficult circumstances.	1	2	3	4
26. I readily adapt to change.	1	2	3	4
27. I share my opinion at appropriate times.	1	2	3	4
28. I maintain a positive attitude when handling my own mistakes.	1	2	3	4
29. I consider other people's feelings when I make decisions.	1	2	3	4
30. I cope effectively with stress.	1	2	3	4
31. I ask for constructive criticism from others.	1	2	3	4
32. I am comfortable giving feedback to others.	1	2	3	4
33. I remain open-minded when attempting new ideas.	1	2	3	4
34. I remain objective when problem solving.	1	2	3	4
35. I can analyze problems from multiple perspectives.	1	2	3	4
36. I am not afraid to ask tough questions.	1	2	3	4
37. I am confident in my decisions.	1	2	3	4
38. I am eager to acquire new knowledge.	1	2	3	4
39. I anticipate potential consequences of situations.	1	2	3	4
40. I am hesitant to make decisions.	1	2	3	4
41. I trust my use of reason to solve problems.	1	2	3	4
42. I tend to see through the complexity of problems.	1	2	3	4
43. I take time to analyze situations before making a decision.	1	2	3	4
44. I am open-minded towards the opinions of others.	1	2	3	4
45. I trust my ability to solve difficult problems.	1	2	3	4
46. I approach problems in a logical way.	1	2	3	4
47. I determine the source of the problem as soon as it is presented.	1	2	3	4
48. I can handle a wide variety of problems.	1	2	3	4



49. Please list the biggest change you have seen in yourself from working as an orientation leader this summer. (Post-test question)

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50. Please list any changes/improvements that you feel would make the orientation experience more effective in the future. (Post-test question)

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1. Gender (please circle)                      Male                      Female

2. Age (please circle)                      18    19    20    21    22

3. I am in the College of \_\_\_\_\_.

4. I am majoring in \_\_\_\_\_.

5. What is the highest level of education your father has completed?

___ High School/GED	___ Bachelor's degree
___ Vocational/technical school	___ Master's degree
___ Some College	___ Doctoral degree
___ Associate's degree	___ Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)
Other (please explain)_____	

6. What is the highest level of education your mother has completed?

___ High School/GED	___ Bachelor's degree
___ Vocational/technical school	___ Master's degree
___ Some College	___ Doctoral degree
___ Associate's degree	___ Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)
Other (please explain)_____	

7. Please list all leadership positions you held in high school.

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8. Please list all organizations you are currently involved in at LSU.

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9. Please list all leadership positions you currently hold at LSU.

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## **VITA**

Kimberly Dottolo Roberts was born and raised in Hammond, Louisiana. After graduating from Southeastern Louisiana University with a Bachelor of Science in math education and Master of Business Administration, Kim moved to Baton Rouge and accepted an administrative position in University Auxiliary Services at Louisiana State University. While Kim served in the role of Manager of the LSU Tiger Card Office, she continued her education in the pursuit of a Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Human Resource Education. Kim has acquired administrative experience in management, budgeting, marketing, and supervision that will be beneficial in her career path as an educator. At the December 2011 commencement, Kim will receive a Doctor of Philosophy in human resource education.