

ALUMNI APPLIED LEADERSHIP LEARNING: The Influence of an Undergraduate Academic Leadership Program

Abstract

Few studies explore post-collegiate leadership applications of alumni who complete curricular leadership programs, like minors or certificates. How can we, as a field, say our leadership programs and courses integrate beyond the boundaries of campus or undergraduate life without an understanding of post-collegiate leadership applications? This study explored the leadership learning of alumni of an undergraduate academic leadership certificate in the southeast United States. The researchers employed a qualitative, single, embedded case study design and data collection for this study. The study primarily relied on in-depth interviews, utilizing an interview guide approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The interview guide's purpose was to focus interviews on topics related to students' learning and current applications of program learning outcomes. This study's findings highlighted the practice of reflection for alumni, appreciation for collaboration and building relationships, and how alumni could connect and apply their past leadership coursework to their current professional or personal leadership experiences. The researchers were interested in exploring how leadership learning in higher education contributed to students' success in their careers, personal life, and community.

Introduction

The presence of curricular leadership studies programs within higher education continues to expand. On campuses throughout the world, these academic experiences serve as a gateway to leadership learning for college students and a central outcome of student development. Leadership learning is defined as "changes in knowledge, skills, behavior, attitudes, and values resulting from educational experiences, both co-curricular and curricular in nature, associated with the activity of leadership" (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 57). Outcomes of leadership learning within curricular leadership studies programs are rarely explored post-degree completion (Mitchell & Daugherty, 2019). As life's progression exposes program graduates to

new experiences, the utilization of their leadership learning remains undefined. The application of leadership learning in a post-collegiate context provides an opportunity for institutions to understand these programs' long-term impacts. Establishing a more in-depth understanding could aid in fine-tuning leadership educator praxis. The insight gained could contribute to making future curriculum content current and applicable to students' undergraduate and post-collegiate experiences. Despite the opportunities in exploring students' post-collegiate leadership learning applications, few studies have examined the topic.

Literature Review

Academic Leadership Programs

One of the ways higher education advances leadership learning is through academic leadership programs. The inception of leadership studies courses in higher education could be traced to the 1980s (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018), and the prevalence of curricular leadership programs continues to rise (Brungardt et al., 2006; Guthrie, Teig, & Hu, 2018). This evolution points to the field's attention on leadership learning as an academic discipline. Komives (2011) noted more than 1,000 higher education institutions have curricular leadership programs, and Guthrie, Teig, & Hu (2018) found 1,558 academic leadership programs existed in the United States as of 2018. Academic leadership programs exist across degree types, including associates, certificates, bachelor's majors and minors, master's, and doctoral. In addition, academic leadership programs are often offered as undergraduate or graduate-level certificates (Guthrie et al., 2018). These programs are often housed in academic disciplines or are structured as interdisciplinary (Guthrie et al., 2018). Brungardt et al., (2006) found variance among the academic departments that host curricular leadership programs, ranging from sociology to education to human services. Over two decades ago, Brungardt and Crawford's (1996) study explored the assessment and evaluation of a curricular leadership program, yet the literature remains scant regarding the assessment of student outcomes for curricular leadership programs.

Leadership Learning as a Component of Student Success

Leadership learning's relationship to student success is relevant to narratives centered on student satisfaction, career readiness, and civic engagement as outcomes of one's collegiate experience (Kuh et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Individual

student and overall developmental indicators make the acquisition of leadership learning a central pursuit in higher education's responsibility to prepare future leaders. For the purposes of this research, "student success is defined as academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, and attainment of educational objectives" (Kuh et al., 2011, p. 10). An overlap between academic leadership program outcomes and student success elements further supports leadership learning's contributions to student success.

Academic program outcomes from accredited institutions aided in the creation of 60 student leadership competencies categorized into four dimensions: knowledge, value, ability (motivation or skill), and behavior (Seemiller, 2013; Seemiller, 2016). Leadership competencies are defined as the "knowledge, values, abilities, and behaviors that help an individual contribute to or successfully engage in a role or task" (Seemiller, 2013, p. 15). The development of these competency-based attributes denotes the long-term influence of leadership learning in academic priorities from various disciplines. Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) stated, "Students must realize that the lessons of leadership - that is, the outcomes of leadership education and pedagogy - transcend the final grade and might aid in enhancing their leadership knowledge, skills, and values" (p. 157). Wagner and Cilente (2011) discussed integrative and interdisciplinary learning in leadership development and described that they "...focus on the ability to apply knowledge to solve problems rather than having simply a mastery of facts" (p. 383). Volpe White and Guthrie (2016) found that students enrolled in an academic leadership certificate program that incorporated intentional reflection had a great awareness of their leadership experiences' benefits. These students identified reflection as a crucial component of self-awareness (Volpe White &

& Guthrie, 2016).

The influence of leadership learning goes beyond students' undergraduate experiences. Program coordinators of leadership minors indicated career and professional development as a primary benefit of their leadership learning as leadership educators (Mitchell & Daugherty, 2019). Student alumni noted their ability to employ leadership language and better understand everyday experiences in a leadership context as outcomes of their leadership minor experience (Mitchell & Daugherty, 2019). Increased marketability resulting from displaying their leadership learning through resumes and skills supported students' career progression (Mitchell & Daugherty, 2019). This study aims to fill the gap in knowledge about students' outcomes after participating in and completing an undergraduate certificate in leadership studies at a university located in the southeast.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore leadership learning utilized by undergraduate alumni in their post-college leadership roles and personal, academic, or career experiences. The alumni recruited for this study graduated from a large research institution in the southeast and completed an academic certificate program in leadership studies. This project is descriptive in nature, and exploratory in the identification of leadership learning gained or attributed to their collegiate experiences (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The research question is: How did completing a curricular leadership studies program influence their leadership learning? The researchers were interested in exploring how leadership learning in higher education contributed to students' success in career, life, and community. It extends the research on academic leadership program outcomes, and the use of qualitative research design shifts from the primarily quantitative research that exists on this topic (Brungardt et al., 2006; Guthrie, Teig, & Hu, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

A recent study identified doctoral-granting research universities as the institutional type with the largest number of academic leadership programs offered in the United States (U.S.) (Guthrie, Teig, & Hu, 2018). Data was retrieved from the International Leadership Association directory, a self-reported directory, including over 1,572 entries at the time data was collected in 2016. This study provides evidence for the ever-increasing emphasis on the outcome of leadership in higher education, resulting in colleges and universities investing more in academic leadership programs (Komives et al., 2011). While this study provides evidence of types of academic leadership programs in the U.S., it does not provide data on if these programs positively influence changes in students' leadership learning or in what ways these programs contribute to students' success post-college. Although some researchers are beginning to study this topic (Mitchell & Daugherty, 2019; Stephens & Beatty, 2015), this would require a more in-depth analysis of program alumni experiences, informed by institutional climate and leadership program considerations, as well as the role other student engagement activities have on their leadership learning and student success outcomes.

The context of this model is the curricular leadership program, where the program alumni serve as the units of analysis; and we contend program completion year, social identity groups, or career fields could influence how the leadership program alumni apply leadership learning post-college. However, the program alumni do not experience the academic leadership program void of context, including time-sensitive curricular leadership program and campus climate conditions, as well as the alumni's student engagement experiences (i.e., other involvement or engagement while in college). The below conceptual framework (Figure 1) is informed by Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) definition of leadership learning and Kuh and colleagues' (2007) guiding framework on student success, which includes a more complex and nuanced path of factors that matter to student success. Kuh and colleagues (2007) identified that

student success includes grades, graduation, and student learning gains, with the following post-college outcomes: employment, graduate or professional school, and lifelong learning. We specify in our

conceptual framework that student success includes leadership learning gains influencing career, life, and community post-college outcomes.

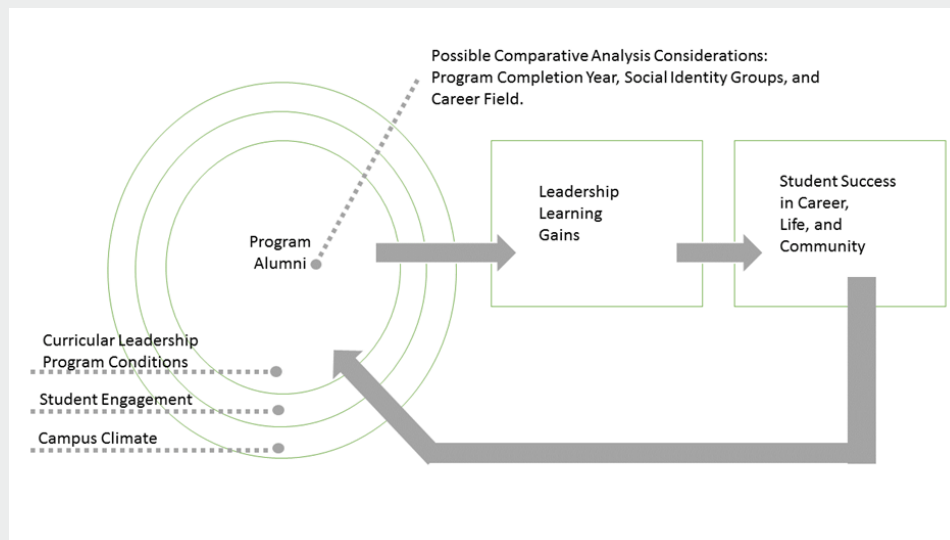


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Leadership Learning for Student Success

Methods

This study employed a qualitative, single, embedded case study design (Yin, 2009). Case study research can be an object of study or a methodology. To answer the research question for this study, we focus on both and define case study methodology as a "...qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). From a philosophical lens, the research process should reveal multiple, contradictory, or complex findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Informed by this belief, the case is the curricular leadership program selected, and the units of analysis (i.e., mini-cases) are the individual alumni who completed the program; bound by place - the

institution and program - the academic leadership studies certificate (Yin, 2009).

A single embedded case study was selected to understand what leadership learning is utilized in post-college experiences, particularly for graduates who completed an academic leadership program. Single case studies are useful for studying topics with limited research and can be used when the program is representative of other programs (Yin, 2014). We feel the program site selected is representative of higher education programs in the U.S. and provides robust curriculum offerings in the field of leadership education. Further, embedded case studies are useful to analyze and interpret findings that might differ because it focuses on several cases with one unit of analysis (i.e., individual student graduates in one program) (Yin, 2014). The researchers' goal was to balance the identification of findings that may be generalized beyond the scope of one curricular

leadership program while also recognizing each student experiences leadership learning differently depending on various factors (e.g., student engagement, campus climate, social identities, career fields, etc.). Multiple-case sampling was used to accomplish this goal, and cross-case analysis will be the primary approach for analyzing the data (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2009).

Data Collection & Case Overview

The program features an 18-credit, interdisciplinary course sequence exploring leadership in multiple contexts through practical and service-learning experiences. Any undergraduate student at the university is eligible to enroll in the certificate. The program requires students to complete five core courses and one approved supporting course. Core courses are rooted in various constructs: leadership theory, service-learning, leading change, experiential learning, and systematic reflection. The supporting course allows students to connect leadership concepts to their academic discipline. Several programmatic outcomes of the leadership certificate were identified as a result of the student's completion. Students will showcase the ability to demonstrate leadership skills, including decision-making, directing others, team building, taking initiative, persuading, performing/presenting, educating, confronting, and negotiating. Additionally, students will demonstrate leadership knowledge and application of leadership theories, dynamics of leadership development, group and organizational dynamics, leadership strategies, and leader accountability (ethics and values clarification). While the site for this study refers to the academic leadership program as a certificate, many institutions discern these same requirements as an academic minor.

As of Fall 2018, 212 students graduated from the program since its inception in 2008. Throughout this project, 189 alumni were recruited through electronic mail, resulting in 74 consenting to participate. Fifty-one alumni interviews were conducted in-person, through video conferencing, or by phone. Data collection for this study was comprised of primarily in-depth interviews utilizing an interview guide

approach to focus the conversation on the study's topics (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Interviews were 45-60 minutes in length and audio-recorded for transcription. Transcribed copies of interviews were provided to participants for member-checking and were reformatted utilizing pseudonyms. Over the last ten years of the project, the interview protocol shifted significantly in 2017 as the priorities transformed; most notably broadening the interview questions to encourage alumni to make meaning of the leadership learning they were integrating into their post-college experiences. Based on the research question for this study, 20 participants were included for analysis, and this included all participants who agreed to participate in the study with the most recent interview protocol.

Data Analysis

To deepen our understanding, a cross-case analysis approach grounds this plan (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2009). Rossman and Rallis (2012) described the benefits of using cross-case analysis and stated, "these analyses respect the integrity of each case and then seek commonalities across cases, as well as differences" (p. 103). Throughout the data analysis process, the research team engaged in reflexivity memoing, noting their own positionality and possible biases (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). In the exploration phase of data analysis, all 20 participants were reviewed by the research team, and an interim summary was created per mini case. These summaries were brief, noting a general synthesis of the case and quality of data. In addition, a partially ordered meta-matrix was organized with descriptive data, including career fields, social identities, student engagement/involvement activities, and other relevant information added throughout the exploration phase. A case analysis meeting with the research team occurred to discuss the summaries and decide on the next steps for analysis, including coding considerations.

The meaning-making phase, driven by the previous phase, identified leadership learning patterns and themes; and included an analysis of any explanatory effects leading to specific learning or student success outcomes. The researchers were interested in

understanding not only what leadership learning is utilized in their post-college experiences, but also what might be attributed to their collegiate experiences broadly and the academic leadership program specifically.

Findings

As participants reflected on what leadership learning experiences were salient for them, they also highlighted how they continue to apply their learning as alumni of the undergraduate leadership certificate. Through data analysis, three key learning outcome themes emerged from this case study. Participants highlighted the practice of reflection, appreciation for collaboration and building relationships, and were able to connect and apply their past leadership coursework and curriculum to their current professional and personal leadership experiences. Each theme individually, and highlighted together reveals alumni of the undergraduate leadership certificate program were able to articulate key leadership learning outcomes that contributed to their current understandings and practices of leadership as a process.

Practice of Reflection

The practice of reflection resonated with students' leadership learning both as a pedagogical practice facilitated by leadership educators while students were in the certificate program and as a practice student's acknowledged as part of their own leadership practice. The quotes below highlight how alumni of the program made meaning of the process of reflection in relation to their leadership courses. Karen, a student who identifies as white and a fall 2013 graduate of the certificate program, shared:

I would say the later courses, I would say even though we did a lot of reflection in the earlier courses, I think the reflection was much more impactful in the later courses. Because I started thinking a lot more, not just about individual experiences, but more larger themes, and especially with the course books that we used for the

final course. That was extremely helpful because I just never heard such in-depth knowledge from – how should I put it – maybe from a very high viewpoint on leadership about the overarching trends in it, and not just from an informational standpoint. So, thinking about it more philosophically, I guess. (Karen)

Some participants felt reflection was an important part of understanding themselves and noted that they had been journaling for a while. For example, Chantal and Kyli, both Women of Color, shared they had been journaling since before their undergraduate careers. They also encouraged others to journal and take moments to just be, particularly in the fast-paced society:

But taking the time to reflect and think back, to honor the folks on your journey that have helped you get where you are, I think all those moments of reflection are so crucial, and I definitely try to take advantage of them when at all possible. (Kyli)

Chantal, who completed the certificate in fall 2012, and other participants highlighted how the process of reflection is now a vital part of who they have become, and the role reflection plays in their leadership practice when they actually take the time to engage with it:

Again, I wouldn't be the person that I am right now. It would be more difficult for me in this role to perform my duties if I hadn't done [reflection]. With some people, it comes more naturally, but I did learn about certain ways to deal with things. So, the way I approach things was probably different now than I would have had I not been in the program. My outlook on situations I feel is different. I may not always realize you're putting leadership practices into play, but if I sit and reflect on it, I suppose that was leadership. It just depends, I suppose, but it has definitely influenced my decisions. (Chantal)

Similar to Chantal, Jeff, a white male first-generation student who completed the certificate in spring 2015, had a particular memory of journaling as reflection and how that process was modeled for him in one of his leadership certificate courses:

Yeah. I mean, I use the things that I've learned every single day. Whether it's my personal reflection – because I remember in one of my classes, we would sit down for the first ten minutes and just write what was on our minds. It didn't have to be anything important. It didn't have to be anything groundbreaking. But what was going on in your life. What the reading was for that week, and how it relates to you... Reflecting every single day to help you grow as a person and then grow the people around you. It's what part of leadership is. It's not just always focusing on yourself. It's the people around you, and helping them make a bigger impact. (Jeff)

Jeff also highlighted how he built stronger critical thinking skills through the practice of reflection:

Things like that. Or maybe it was a quote that someone put on the board. And, 'What does that mean to you?' So it's more challenging thinking. Critical thinking. And that helps me every single day. Whether I'm at work in a meeting and I hear what my boss says. I try to critically think a little bit deeper on the topic, rather than just the surface-level thinking that a lot of people end up doing. (Jeff)

Jeff, and others, shared that this key leadership practice of reflection is something he still engages in and feels it makes a large impact on his leadership style and approach to working collaboratively with others.

Appreciation for Collaboration and Building Relationships

Participants shared an underlying appreciation for the practice of collaboration and building relationships, being committed to understanding the other person,

and wanting to co-create goals and visions with other people. Many participants highlighted how they remembered key parts of the leadership studies curriculum when building relationships across differences in their current professional roles. For example, Chantal shared:

Being a woman of color, it's very easy to be welcoming to others because I know that they're not always going to get it. So, as an advisor, I do see a lot of students from a lot of different backgrounds, a lot of different places, and a lot of different parts of the world. Things are always different. What I try to do is be accommodating of this and understanding that, especially with certain students, there are going to be differences. How can I better understand them and their differences? (Chantal)

Chantal went on to share how she is committed to understanding others who are different from her in her role as an advisor to college students:

Right now, I'm also doing the global partner certificate so that it can help me to better interact with students with these diverse backgrounds. I haven't had an issue thus far. But I can say I've had experiences where... English isn't their first language. I try to communicate as best I can. I've heard a lot of stories about how, especially students from certain parts of the world, they don't value things that we do. It's a matter of trying to get to where they're at so that I can better advise them and understand where they're coming from. All of it is welcome in my office. I'll try my hardest to understand, to make you feel comfortable, make you feel you can come to me with anything that you need. So, I'm trying my best. (Chantal)

Other participants highlighted the importance of being intentional when building meaningful relationships with colleagues and loved ones in their life. Lindsey, who identifies as a white woman and completed the certificate in fall 2015, shared how

being intentional when working with others means keeping the end goal in mind: he shared:

I would say, yeah, I think it's more personal when it comes to being accepting and creating opportunities to work with diverse populations. It's just being mindful and being present and realizing what the end goal is. I think in a time of society – of what's going on in the world, we have to make sure we're being very intentional with that and creating those opportunities when the opportunity arises to create those opportunities, just 'cause everybody deserves to be loved on and all that. That's going – yeah, I would say just being intentional in my life with the people I work with and the people that I get to love on and stuff like that. (Lindsey)

Mark, who identifies as a White Man and completed the leadership certificate in spring 2008, highlighted how he felt he has changed since his undergraduate career and the role the leadership certificate, as well as graduate school, has played in him being more open to engaging with people that were different than him.

I would say ten years ago I was a much more conservative person than I am now. And I feel that my education really opened my mind towards walking in other people's shoes. Both for leadership certificate, my education at [southeast institution] and my MBA program, all those things have changed my identity and my perception. And that has allowed me to meet new people and engage and really progress. If I hadn't had those things, I would have stayed stuck, probably in the solidity and handy way of thinking. (Mark)

Jeff highlighted this point as well, of taking into consideration other points of view when working collaboratively. Learning through reflection, while considering other points of view when working collaboratively were key learning moments for other participants as well. Jeff highlighted this point when

I think it definitely comes from taking a step back and looking at everyone's perspective. You can jump into something full force and completely fail. And that's okay. That reflection part that comes in, and seeing how you failed, or what you could do better. Or looking from someone else's perspective and seeing why they see that you failed, or what you could be doing better. And I think that logical perspective has definitely helped me a lot, by taking a look back and being like, All right. Well, I see why they didn't like this. Because they're not used to it. So maybe we can introduce it in a different way. (Jeff)

Jeff highlighted the role of reflection in taking into account other points of view, showing the integrative nature of the learning outcomes highlighted by the alumni in this case.

Applications to Current Professional and Personal Leadership Experiences

The application and ability to make connections of their experiences as alumni were key aha moments for participants. Participants pointed to times when they purposefully applied their leadership learning and were actually making meaning of their leadership certificate coursework and classroom experiences as important reminders of the role the program plays in their current life when understanding leadership. Lindsey explicitly highlights this point when she shared:

I think I've thought a lot back to actually my leadership programming and when we did managing transitions and leadership and change class and deep change, and like looking back and going "Okay, this is why I'm doing what I'm doing and change is uncomfortable" but change is necessary, and like completely moving to a new place, like even becoming more financially independent and things like that. I'd say these past few months since graduating

has been a whirlwind, but a good one in that. (Lindsey)

Mark highlights a key life lesson he learned regarding leadership and change that he still applies almost a decade later:

It was a while ago now, let's see, nine or ten years ago that I finished the program. So, it's a little tough. But I think the best lesson I took was from... class... was leadership and change. [The Instructor] had a little quotation he liked to throw around that "Learning must precede change," that's what he said. Because if you try to change without understanding the situation and the history then you're doomed to fail. And I've found that before I even try to do new things I need to know where everybody else has been in the past and what they've tried, and where they've failed, too, so that I can do better. I think that's helped me a lot. I've always remembered that. (Mark)

Some participants, at first had difficulty thinking of examples on the spot, but either after answering a few questions about their learning or through the natural flow of the conversation, participants were able to offer key and specific learning moments in the leadership certificate program that still sticks with them to this day and how they apply those key learning takeaways to their professional and personal leadership approaches.

Discussion

The findings from this study are consistent with previous research that found participating in academic leadership programs provides opportunities for students to reflect on their leadership learning, build relationships with the intention for collaboration as a part of the leadership process, and the significant benefits of learning across difference (Chunoo & Guthrie, 2018; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Guthrie & McCrake, 2010; Volpe White & Guthrie, 2016). Volpe White and Guthrie (2016) found that structured reflection can serve as both a program outcome

and a learning outcome. The alumni from this study highlighted how they used reflection to heighten their self-awareness in order to assess changes in their leadership capacity and identify areas for growth. Participants in this study shared signs of growth through reflection of their leadership development, cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, and communication skills. Self-awareness also centers on gaining insight into one's identity and one's social location in society. This insight includes exploring such facets of self, such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical abilities, socioeconomic status, and cultural background, among others. Critical reflection not only generates new learning opportunities, but also deepens the learning for all engaged in the process of reflection (Volpe White & Guthrie, 2016). This study highlights examples like Karen who now incorporates the process of reflection into her life following her undergraduate career. Findings from this study are again similar to Volpe White & Guthrie (2016) that stress that "reflection is essential to applying leadership learning to students' lives" (p. 70), even following completing the leadership certificate program.

When considering building relationships for the purpose of collaboration and facilitating/modeling this process in leadership education, Komives and Dugan (2007) shared how when students worked with their team members, student leaders exhibited group-oriented skills aimed at fostering collaboration, creating a common purpose, and dealing with controversy. This current study offers how students take this learning and centering of valuing relationship building, and then incorporate this practice into their leadership process as working professionals. Chantal, a Woman of Color, highlighted how relationship building contributed to developing common goals and plans to work towards those goals when engaged in the leadership process. The lasting impact of learning across differences and the role this plays in contributing to making change was a key outcome that participants could draw from when considering their current understandings of leadership as a process.

Finally, the application of specific leadership certificate

topics and learning moments to current professional and personal roles was also a key finding that the alumni highlighted. Alumni were able to share specific course topics that left lasting impressions on them and their understandings of leadership. For example, Lindsey was able to remember the change process as uncomfortable, but necessary, especially when she was in the middle of a salient change moment in her professional life. The finding from this story aligns with Mitchell and Daugherty's (2019) study that found that alumni highlighted the application of leadership language to everyday experiences and were able to situate these experiences into a leadership context. This finding also brings to life Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) point that students must realize that the application of leadership goes beyond a curricular grade but contributes to their ongoing knowledge, skills, and values, all of which go beyond their undergraduate learning while in the academic leadership program.

The findings from this study were analyzed with consideration to the conceptual framework (Figure 1). The framework centers Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) definition of leadership learning as the shift in gaining "knowledge, skills, behavior, attitudes, and values resulting from educational experiences" associated with leadership (p. 57). The framework goes on to connect this concept of learning to the outcomes of Kuh and colleagues' (2007) student success framework, where they identified student learning gains as a central contributor to student success. While previous studies have not provided specific findings on what ways these programs contribute to students' success post-college, the findings in this study outlined what areas and types of learning gains occurred in participants learning of leadership post-baccalaureate in a curricular program.

Findings from this study offer a deeper analysis of leadership curricular program alumni's meaning making and application of key concepts from their leadership education. Participants were clearly able to articulate the role of the undergraduate leadership academic program in contributing to these learning gains of leadership and provide examples

of application of leadership theory and practices they adopted from their academic coursework. These participants provided examples of when they were able to make applications to leadership in their current roles and times when they reflected specifically on their leadership learning. The findings in this study also highlight specific examples of when participants felt they were building relationships with the intention for collaboration as a part of the leadership process and the significant benefits of learning across difference (Guthrie & Chunoo, 2018; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Guthrie & Thompson, 2010; Owen, 2016; Volpe White & Guthrie, 2016). These findings contributed to the students' ongoing success following college in their careers, communities, and personal life.

Conclusion

Future research in leadership education should continue to explore alumni and their post-collegiate application of leadership education curriculum. This study aimed to broaden the understanding of student success in relation to leadership learning through contributing to the knowledge on post-collegiate application of the long-term impacts of these programs. Similar to the findings of Volpe White and Guthrie (2016), students in this study identified reflection as being a crucial component of self-awareness. Leadership educators should continue to consider how intentional personal reflection is rooted in leadership education curriculum and how reflection informs student success outcomes. This study also highlights the important need to continue to offer relevant course content that is applicable to students' post-collegiate experiences and makes leadership education explicit to their personal and professional lives. Examples should provide practical applications, so students have the opportunity to facilitate exercises focused on learning across differences and centering the value of collaboration.

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