Leadership Skills of First-Year Students

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(ABSTRACT)

Colleges and universities are focusing on graduating students who will succeed in careers (Braxton, Smart, & Thieke, 1991; Erwin, 1991; Quinn, 2004). Numerous skills have been identified as important to employers, including leadership skills (Gale, 2002; Gerber, 2003; Kerka, 1990; Stronge, 1998; Santosus, 2003). As a result, institutions have introduced programs designed to train students on those leadership skills (Freeman, Knott, & Schwartz, 1994; Posner & Brodsky, 1993; Riggio, Ciulla, & Sorenson, 2003). Despite the interest in leadership skills, very little research has been done to look at baseline leadership skills that students possess when they matriculate.

The purpose of this study was to examine the pre-college leadership skills of first year students and examine differences by race and gender on eight distinct scales. These eight scales were defined by the Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) (Vann, 2000). A total of 550 participants of various racial and gender classifications were chosen to participate in the study from a population of all first-year students at a large, public, research institution in the United States.

Participants reported moderately high levels of leadership skills on all eight scales. Differences by race were not revealed. However, differences by gender were found on the technology scale of the instrument. An interaction effect between race and gender was also revealed on the technology scale. Overall, it would seem that students matriculate with some intact leadership skills. Administrators might use this baseline skill level when designing leadership development opportunities for students.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................ iv

List of Tables .................................................................................................................... vi

List of Appendices .......................................................................................................... vii

Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................... 1

  Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................ 6

  Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 6

  Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 7

  Delimitations ................................................................................................................... 9

  Organization of the Study .............................................................................................. 10

Chapter Two: Literature Review ....................................................................................... 11

  Research on Leadership Skills in General .................................................................... 11

  Leadership Skills in Primary and Secondary School Students .................................. 13

  Leadership Skills among College Students ................................................................ 15

  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 21

Chapter Three: Methodology .......................................................................................... 22

  Sample Selection .......................................................................................................... 22

  Instrumentation ............................................................................................................. 24

  Validity and Reliability ................................................................................................. 29

  Data Collection Procedures ......................................................................................... 30

  Data Analysis Procedures ............................................................................................ 31
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) Item Breakdown.........................26
Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample..........................................................35
Table 3: Differences in Sex and Race between Potential Sample and Actual Sample..............37
Table 4: Pre-College Leadership Skills of First-year Students..........................................38
Table 5: Results of T-Test on differences in Pre-College Leadership Skills by Race..............39
Table 6: Results of T-Test on differences in Pre-College Leadership Skills by Gender..........41
Table 7: Results of Two-Way ANOVA on Interaction between Race and Gender on Pre-College Leadership Skills...............................................................42
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Initial Email..........................................................70
Appendix B: Follow-Up Email....................................................72
Appendix C: Message to Building Supervisors............................74
Appendix D: Message to Resident Advisors...............................76
Appendix E: Complete Survey Information...............................78
Appendix F: IRB Approval..........................................................87