

Leadership Skills of First-Year Students

By

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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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