

**An Assessment of a First-Year Leadership Program**

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### ABSTRACT

Mary Kate Havlik

Leadership development programs provide many positive outcomes for college students (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Strifflino & Saunders, 1989; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). Leadership programs aid students in their academic achievement (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989), and leadership skills (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999).

A specific type of leadership development programs are first-year leadership programs, or FYLPs. With similar goals as general leadership programs, FYLPs are created with the special needs and interests of first-year students in mind (Peraza, 2004). These programs encourage higher retention rates (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989), leadership skills such as teamwork and self-awareness (Outcalt, 2001), and ethical leadership (Peraza, 2004). As important as FYLPs are to the development of first-year students, though, there has not been sufficient enough research on their effectiveness in achieving their purpose.

The purpose of this study was to assess the short and long-term effects of a particular FYLP on its participants as measured by the Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) (Vann, 2004). Participants included both FYLP and non-FYLP students at a midsized Midwestern institution. Results showed little difference in the improvement of leadership skills between FYLP and non-FYLP participants, and little change between each class of FYLP. Results did show that students who participated in the FYLP their freshman year went on to engage in more leadership activities than students who did not complete the FYLP.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As states increase higher education spending accountability, institutions have a greater responsibility to perform assessments to justify spending these funds on programs (Attinasi, 1992; Buckner & Williams, 1995; Erwin, 1990; Ewell, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Sims, 1992; Upcraft & Schuh, 2000). While financial support to state institutions was once automatically given, now budget cuts and a perceived fairness toward other state entities have caused higher education institutions to fight for funds, justifying continuation of funds for instruction and programs through assessment (Erwin, 1991). Assessment becomes critical when the public questions the value of higher education and taxpayer dollars used to fund its existence (Attinasi, 1992).

The call for assessment practices and student outcomes originated in 1983 by federal and state governments, as well as by national commissions (Sims, 1992). Since then, according to Woodward, Hyman, von Destinon, and Jamison (1991), several national reports have been written about the quality of the undergraduate experience and student outcomes. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, assessment and evaluation activities led to the reorganization of both academic instruction and non-academic programs (Ewell, 1987; Hyman, Beeler, & Benedict, 1994).

One outcome from the push for evaluation and assessment has been a focus onto institutional outcomes, instead of focus on the effects of institutional inputs such as funds, faculty, and resources on students (Sims, 1992; Woodward, Hyman, von Destinon, & Jamison, 1991). Schools previously used institutional inputs to assess the quality of instruction without knowing the effects on outputs, as if the amount of money spent on instruction alone accounted



for the quality of education (Ewell, 1987). With assessment of institutions now closely linked with the accreditation process, the emphasis is now focused on the quality of instruction and education (Erwin, 1991), and outcomes (Hyman, Beeler, & Benedict, 1994).

Many institutions see assessment merely as a reporting activity to justify funds, and not one in which they can improve their instruction and programs (Ewell, 1987). This is especially dangerous for student affairs, an administrative unit that tends to limit assessment to anecdotal stories and limited surveys on few programs (McDade, 1994). Many times, student affairs officers are unsure of the role they play in institutional assessment (Hyman, Beeler, & Benedict, 1994).

Assessment in student affairs has a twofold purpose. First, as with institutional assessment, it aids in the evaluation and improvement of programs and services within the departments (Erwin, 1990). Secondly, it demonstrates student affairs' dedication to the mission of the college and university – to educate students. Failure to assess programs may affect student affairs negatively. Linking assessment with the goals indicative of academic affairs further legitimizes student affairs in the institution, and connects the departments (Erwin, 1990; Upcraft & Schuh, 2000).

Student affairs professionals generally are not intrinsically driven to assessment. In a study by Woodward, Hyman, von Destinon, and Jamison (1991) surveying a number of institutions, the majority of student affairs departments undertake assessment processes only for accountability purposes, and not improvement. There may be many reasons why this is, such as lack of time or money, or fear of the results of such assessment (Upcraft & Schuh, 2000). To understand the effects of student development programs through student affairs departments to both justify their existence and improve where they are faulted, student affairs professionals must

perform assessment for the purpose of evaluation, with the intention of using the information to improve these student development programs (Upcraft & Schuh, 2000).

The Council of the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) emphasizes the importance of assessment in the creation and development of leadership programs for colleges and universities (2003). Assessment should include a regular review of whether the program's mission, goals, and development outcomes are achieved. The program director should also periodically evaluate how the program parallels the institutional mission. This information, as well as a longitudinal study of evaluations, can then be used to improve the program for its participants (CAS, 2003).

Most leadership programs already employ satisfaction surveys administered directly after the program and based on students' perceptions of aspects of the program, such as the effectiveness of techniques, or the leadership style inventories employed. Few institutions actually measure leadership skills or growth related to the program (CAS, 2003; McDade, 1994). This limits any large-scale program improvement. Due to the importance of assessment, it is crucial that assessment of leadership programs be completed. Assessment can answer accountability questions, as well as validate that particular program and its use on campus, while justifying the costs, both monetary and human resources (Buckner & Williams, 1995; Roberts & Ullom, 1989; Schuh & Upcraft, 1998; Upcraft & Schuh, 2000). Assessment is necessary to ensure the program is current with research and students' needs (Janosik & Sina, 1988). Those efforts improve the program, and they assist in its longevity (Chambers, 1994).

In summary, the call for assessment in higher education has increased due to budget cuts and the subsequent demand for accountability (Attinasi, 1992; Buckner & Williams, 1995; Erwin, 1990; Ewell, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Sims, 1992; Upcraft & Schuh, 2000).

The call for assessment in student affairs has increased as well. Student affairs has responded minimally, but has not used this as an opportunity to improve their programs (Ewell, 1987). This lack of assessment and evaluation is detrimental to the effectiveness of such programs, including leadership development programs (Buckner & Williams, 1995; McDade, 1994).

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of a first-year leadership program (FYLP) on the perceived improvement of leadership skills of its participants, as measured by the Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) (Vann, 2004). This one-semester FYLP was designed to develop students' understanding of leadership through their participation in an intentional learning environment based on community and growth, while building leadership skills. The FYLP also sought to provide positive role models with mentors, empower students as individuals, and to help them develop their leadership style. This FYLP at a midsized private institution in the Midwest employs a retreat at the beginning of the year, upperclassmen mentors, and bi-monthly workshops on topics such as ethics and integrity, power and conflict, and diversity. The FYLP also strongly encourages student organizational involvement as soon as students start the program.

The participants are students who completed the FYLP in the Fall semesters of 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005. Students who did not participate in the FYLP, but were assumed to have had similar leadership experiences such as student government involvement and/or fraternity/sorority involvement, were chosen as the control group. Participants completed a modified version of the Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) (Vann, 2004). This survey measures improvement in leadership skills in eight subcategories: self-management, interpersonal, problem-solving/decision-making, cognitive development/critical analysis, career

development, organization and planning, self-confidence, and multicultural competencies. The survey also measures the amount and type of leadership activities, which are defined as involvements in student groups or university departments, especially in some sort of officer capacity, or specialized leadership training. The study was conducted at a private Midwestern university.

### Research Questions

Specifically, this study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. Do students who participate in FYLPs engage in more leadership activities than students who do not participate in FYLPs?
2. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills between FYLP participants one semester after completion of the program when compared to non-FYLP participants?
3. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills between FYLP participants one year after completion of the program when compared to non-FYLP participants?
4. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills between FYLP participants two years after completion of the program when compared to non-FYLP participants?
5. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills between FYLP participants three years after completion of the program when compared to non-FYLP participants?
6. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills of FYLP participants over time (i.e. Freshmen to Senior)?

### Significance of the Study

This study was significant for future practice, research, and policy. In terms of practice, one constituency that might benefit from this study is student affairs professionals. The results of this study provided data on the impact of FYLPs on student leadership experiences. Student affairs professionals might use this data to design new or evaluate existing FYLPs at their schools.

This study could also benefit those concerned with assessment in student affairs. The findings provided researchers with information on how assessment can be used within student affairs, further legitimizing efforts to build solid programs with positive results. Researchers could use this information to further design and implement assessment efforts in student affairs.

Another constituency that may benefit from this study would be first-year students. The results of this study provided first-year students with the information on the impact of participating in FYLPs. This data could enable students to make informed decisions about their participation in an FYLP.

This study might also inform future research. The present study examined how leadership skills improve over time after participation in a first-year leadership program. Future studies might examine how leadership skills improve over time after participation in leadership programs designed for and aimed at students of any class. This would provide information on different types of leadership programs.

This study examined the impact of a FYLP by surveying first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year students. Future studies might follow a particular class of participants as they continue through their college career. Such a study would further reveal the long-term effects of a FYLP on the same group of participants.

The present study employed quantitative methods to determine the impact of participation in a FYLP. Future studies could use qualitative methods to obtain a thorough understanding of the effects of FYLPs on participants' leadership abilities. Such techniques could provide rich data about the outcomes of FYLPs on participants.

Lastly, the current study surveyed a particular FYLP at a medium sized private university in the Midwest. Future studies might survey other programs using the same methodology. In doing so, these studies could gather more information on diverse programs centered in diverse institutions.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study provided information that informs student affairs practice and research, but as with any study, it has some limitations. The first has to do with the sample. All participants for this study attended a medium-sized, private institution in the Midwest. These students may not be representative of students from other institutions. This may affect the generalizability of the findings.

Another limitation relates to the technique used to gather results. When using a self-report questionnaire, there is the possibility that respondents might not have shared candid answers. The participants could have responded to the questions indicating inflated perceptions of their leadership skills, rather than their actual leadership skills. This may have affected the reliability of the results.

This study was also limited in that matched pairing was not used. Matched pairing would have coordinated the two groups, with a non-FYLP participant chosen because of similar characteristics to a FYLP participant. This would have ensured the closest comparison between

groups, and reduced comparisons made based on assumption of similarity. Given the methods used in this study, causality cannot be determined.

Lastly, another limitation is related to the use of a survey. The survey may not have fully explored the range of leadership skills possible in the participants. The fixed questions and answers may have precluded other information on the participants' experience. If so, this may have affected the results of this study.

Despite these limitations, the study is still beneficial. The current study was useful because it evaluated the worth of a first-year leadership program that had yet to perform such an evaluation.

#### Organization of the Study

This study is organized around five chapters. The first contains an overview of the study, including the purpose of the research and the research questions to be explored. Chapter Two provides a literature review on the topic of leadership programs, with emphasis on first-year leadership programs. In Chapter Three, the methodology of the study is explained, including the sampling techniques and the procedures used to collect and analyze data. Chapter Four reports the results of the study, while Chapter Five contains a discussion of these results and their implications for future practice and research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

To examine the research related to this study, I reviewed the literature on leadership and leadership programs. Three topics emerged regarding this effort: literature focused on the outcomes of student involvement and leadership activities on college campuses; literature focused on leadership programs in general; and literature focused specifically on first-year leadership programs in particular.

This study of leadership was also broken down into the particular leadership skills of the SLOI. These skills are (a) self-management, (b) interpersonal skills, (c) problem-solving/decision making, (d) cognitive development/critical analysis, (e) career development, (f) organization and planning, (g) self-confidence, and (h) multicultural competencies. First, an attempt at defining leadership will be made.

It is a difficult task to define leadership. One of the early and well-known authors, James McGregor Burns, broke ground in 1978 with his definition of transformational leadership (Rogers, 1992), which focused less on the traditionally masculine, Type-A leaders, and more on the relationship between “leaders” and “followers” (Komives, 2000). His new focus reinvigorated the topic of leadership (CAS, 2003) and the numerous attempts to define it (Bass, 1995).

Leadership can focus on personality, behavior, interactions with others, and how one reacts to certain situations (Bass, 1995; Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1995). The many definitions have focused on behaviors or traits that make up a leader, or how leadership skills may be developed (McDade, 1994). Knowing this, coming to one definition of leadership may not be beneficial to this study (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 1995).



Although there may be no one answer to what leadership is among the more than 350 definitions (Bennis, 1995), one can determine that leadership, at the very least, is a dynamic relationship between people. Both leaders and followers exercise influence that is often attributed to leaders alone (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 1995). This relationship is usually centered on a common goal, as those involved work together to accomplish a task or accomplish change (CAS, 2003). Certain leadership skills and behavior, though, can lead to more effective leaders (Yukl, 1994). These leadership skills, for the purpose of this study, are those defined by the SLOI, to be discussed fully later, whose scales can be found throughout the literature on leadership.

#### Research on the Outcomes of Student Involvement and Leadership Activities

Involvement in out-of-class experiences often provides students the leadership opportunities they want and need to excel in their class work and in their careers after college. Student involvement, according to Astin (1984), refers to, “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). This energy is spent on activities such as student organizations and time on campus with faculty and peers. The more involved a student is in these activities, the more the student will grow and learn (Astin, 1984). Indeed, students who are involved tend to be more developmentally mature than students who are not involved (Williams & Winston, 1985). Part of this maturity is the ongoing redefinition of leadership based on their experiences, as leadership becomes less based in a positional leader, and more based on the group involvement and interactions, so there is not one “leader” (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005).

Student involvement in leadership activities on campus has been well-documented (Bialek & Groves, 1998; Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, &

Burkhardt, 2001; Komives et al., 2005; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Strifflino & Saunders, 1989; Williams & Winston, 1985). Much of the research on student involvement examines the benefits of these experiences.

Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001), in their study of students who participated in typical leadership activities such as attending leadership workshops and holding a student organization officer position, found many gains associated with such activities. For instance, students who participate in leadership activities show higher gains and growth than those not involved in leadership activities in decision-making skills and conflict resolution skills. In addition, along with growth in other typical leadership areas such as setting goals and civic responsibility, students who participated in leadership activities were dedicated to developing leadership skills for those around them. Students who participate in leadership opportunities also report growth in self-esteem (Schuh & Laverty, 1983), interpersonal communication (Bialek & Groves, 1998), and interdependence (Williams & Winston, 1995), the latter two as measured in the SLOI.

Involvement in activities that require leadership skills and abilities may even positively affect academic success (Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994; Peraza, 2004). Leadership opportunities are beneficial to a student's academic life. Student leaders go on to achieve more in education than do those not involved with leadership activities (Astin, 1993). These students will also achieve higher in tasks concerning their plans for education and plans for career development (Williams & Winston, 1995).

The impact of leadership experiences extends far after graduation. Those with such experiences are positively influenced in personal growth and development measures (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989). Skills in leadership and teamwork after graduation have been positively

affected by involvement and leadership in student organizations in college (Bialek & Groves, 1998). Graduates also report gains in leadership skills such as “ability to deal with complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity” (Cress et al., 2001, p. 22), and community awareness. These skills, as well as other effects such as confidence in a professional setting, positively affect a student’s career after college (Bialek & Groves, 1998).

The institution itself also benefits from the development of students into leaders (Dooley & Shellogg, 2002). These students provide the institution with skilled officers to manage campus organizations dedicated to the institution and the students they serve (Stiffolino & Saunders, 1989). Leadership opportunities also provide students with a means to become involved in the well-being of the institution, becoming dedicated and loyal students and future alumni (Bialek & Groves, 1998).

#### Research on Leadership Programs in General

Student involvement opportunities give students many advantages over those that do not participate. In fact, these students who spend the most time in student organizations as a member or an officer have the highest growth in leadership skills (Astin, 1993). Leadership programs can be a valuable precursor to student leadership roles, and provide some of the same benefits.

Unfortunately in the past, programs were designed and directed toward those students who already were in positions of leadership. Initially, resident advisors, student organizational officers, and Greek leaders were the only ones who were offered leadership development opportunities (CAS, 2003). Leadership development programs should include more than just the traditional student leaders on campus. The traditional view of student leaders as merely those who hold high-ranking student positions must be replaced with the concept that all students have potential for leadership in any situation (Cress et al., 2001).

One purpose of leadership development programs is to provide students with an additional opportunity for the growth of cognitive skills in the context of the institution's educational mission (Buckner & Williams, 1995). Many times, students involved in leadership development programs are more invested in their academic and out-of-class success because of these experiences, more so than students not involved in leadership programs (Strifolino & Saunders, 1989). Opportunities in leadership development programs for self- and other-awareness, and appreciation of others' values and viewpoints (CAS, 2003) broaden the academic component of higher education (Buckner & Williams, 1995).

Another purpose of leadership development programs is to develop more effective leaders. These leaders should have the knowledge needed to create good change, and create that change with purpose as leaders of their organizations (CAS, 2003). In addition, leadership is a constant learning process, as each lesson builds on the last, so students can apply what they have learned in leadership positions in college to their careers and interests once they have graduated.

There are many benefits to involvement in leadership programs. Similar to those benefits found in participation in student activities, participants in leadership programs have shown growth in relation to their leadership skills and confidence in their abilities to lead (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkardt, 1999). Leadership programs give participants the opportunity to understand leadership theory and apply theory (Buckner & Williams, 1995), amplifying their knowledge and abilities (Cress et al., 2001).

To really use leadership, we must tap into a student's potential for leadership (Komives, 2000). Developing students throughout the college or university with the use of leadership programs will prepare students for the changing demands of our society for leaders (CAS, 2003; Roberts & Ullom, 1989). Roberts and Ullom (1989) contend that, "student leadership programs

should be an integral part of our academic and cocurricular offerings” (p. 74). Not only do leadership programs prepare students for future leadership roles, they also prepare students for the roles they play on campus, thereby improving campus life. Leadership training and development will benefit our institutions (Janosik & Sina, 1988).

### Research on First-Year Leadership Programs

First-year leadership programs (FYLPs), often known as Emerging Leader programs, are geared toward students new to college. They allow new students to become immediately involved on campus. These programs not only provide students with the opportunity of getting involved on campus and taking leadership roles early on, they also impact retention and socialization (Peraza, 2004; Pratt et al., 2000; Strifolino & Saunders, 1989).

The first-year transition is a remarkably difficult one, as students leave the comfort of home and high school to enter a completely different place with a need to make new friends and connections. The loss of social networks and the introduction, but not complete understanding of, college social networks is important to consider when developing a FYLP (Peraza, 2004). To decrease the stress and angst of this situation, and to prevent a poor transition or dropping out, student affairs administrators should foster new social outlets (Pratt et al., 2000).

Leadership programs often are one way institutions can help retain students (Stifolino & Saunders, 1989), especially in those crucial first six weeks of school (Levitz & Noel, 1989). This key transition period in a student’s life may be the first time a student needs to adapt to a completely new situation, an adaptation in which they may not have the skills to successfully complete (Brooks & DuBois, 1995). A FYLP can help first-year students create an attachment to the institution, and help them feel as if they are included and an integral part of campus (Strifolino & Saunders, 1989).

One way a sense of inclusiveness is created in FYLPs is through the use of mentors. Mentors provide freshmen with a friend to guide them through their first year, and an insider's look into upper-class leadership structures (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989). The mentor also provides freshmen with social networks that can be crucial to a student's introduction to college life (Peraza, 2004).

FYLPs also help first-year students rebuild social networks they had at home, like friends and family, by introducing them to other students of the same class going through similar transitions. These interactions can help to decrease the stress that comes with a new environment, and decrease the chance these students may withdrawal from the school (Pratt et al., 2000). Both mentors and interactions with other students in a similar situations help with the first-year transition to college.

First-year leadership programs provide benefits for both students and the institution. For the students, a FYLP and other leadership opportunities give them a chance to become fully invested in their experience as a college student (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989). When an institution places its "strongest, most student-centered people, programs, and services in the freshman year" (Levitz & Noel, 1989, p. 79), or *front loads*, it provides freshmen with the greatest tools to begin a successful route through college.

FYLPs have also proved to benefit students in the areas of leadership skills, leadership experiences, diversity appreciation, teamwork, and knowing the importance of responsibility (Outcalt, 2001; Strifflino & Saunders, 1989). Leadership skills such as self-awareness and dedication to civic issues resulted from participation in a FYLP at UCLA. Students reported higher gains in teamwork, appreciation of diversity and the role of responsibility in college and future leadership positions (Outcalt, 2001). In a FYLP at Longwood University, students were

ready for future leadership positions because of their involvement in the FYLP. The authors suggest that this would not have been the case without the FYLP (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989).

### Leadership Skills

Indeed, first-year leadership programs, as well as most leadership programs, prepare students to develop the leadership skills that are critical to their success as students and after they graduate. A number of dimensions are related to these leadership skills that can both be taught and measured. Following is a brief look at what each of these leadership skills are and how leadership programs and activities can positively affect a student's development in these areas. These dimensions, found in the SLOI, will also be discussed further later in this study.

One aspect of leadership skills is related to self-management. Students who participate in leadership programs and activities rate higher on self-management skills such as stress management and establishing priorities (Cooper, Healy & Simpson, 1994).

Interpersonal skills are also an important component of leadership. For instance, students who participated in one leadership experience reported higher levels of interpersonal communication because of their involvement (Bialek & Groves, 1998). Students in different leadership development programs stated they improved in their public speaking skills because of their involvement, not only outside, but also inside the classroom (Outcalt, 2001). Group interactions within student organizations build other skills such as conflict resolution and the reliance on others to work effectively despite inclinations to work alone (Komives et al., 2005).

Skills in problem-solving and decision making also are indicative of a good leader (CAS, 2003). Those who participate in leadership programs and activities report more growth in conflict resolution skills and decision-making abilities (Cress et al., 2001). Leadership activities

outside of the classroom provide students with the opportunity to improve their decision-making skills (Schuh & Laverty, 1983).

One way to measure leadership skills is to determine cognitive development and critical analysis. Students who participate in leadership programs and activities can apply what they learn to every day tasks and situations. Students who participate in leadership development programs also have a higher ability to think critically in complex, uncertain, and ambiguous situations (Cress et al., 2001).

Career development is another important aspect of leadership development. Many students build invaluable leadership skills that they use beyond college because of their involvement in leadership programs and activities. Indeed, students who are involved with student organizations and leadership activities show higher achievement in regards to their career plans (Williams & Winston, 1985).

Skills in organization and planning are also associated with leadership. Students who participate in leadership programs and activities show higher abilities to plan and organize programs (Cress et al., 2001), for the welfare of their organization or group. This includes setting and meeting goals and deadlines (Schuh & Laverty, 1983).

Self-confidence can also be increased through a student's participation in leadership programs. Students that participated in leadership programs funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation reported growth in their confidence in their abilities (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). These results, as well as an increase in the clarification of their own personal values, have been duplicated in research of other leadership activities as well (Bialek & Groves, 1998; Cress et al., 2001; Outcalt, 2001). Because of increased self-confidence, student leaders can go on to take more risks and become secure in their leadership roles (Komives et al., 2005).



A leadership skill such as one's multicultural competency is also a potential gain for students involved in leadership activities such as leadership programs. Both Cress et al., (2001) and Outcalt (2001) found that students in these activities had higher gains in the development of their awareness and appreciation of diversity than their non-involved counterparts.

Leadership skills can be taught in leadership experiences such as student organizational involvement, university committee involvement, and formal leadership programs such as FYLPs. Unfortunately, the information on FYLPs is limited. Only a few studies were located on FYLPs, with only a few of those articles within the last 10 years (Outcalt, 2001; Peraza, 2004). Many times programs are created at the whims of the student affairs professional, with little needs assessments conducted or evaluations performed. Although anecdotal information tells us that FYLPs are important to the development of first-year students, and the development of a group of highly effective campus leaders, more research needs to be completed to show the effects of both of individual programs and FYLPs across campuses.

### Summary

In summary, the research regarding leadership and the benefits of leadership opportunities or training is extensive. Student involvement in leadership roles and activities provides many positive outcomes for college students (Astin, 1984; Bialek & Groves, 1998; Cooper, Healy & Simpson, 1994; Cress et al., 2001; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Strifolino & Saunders, 1989; Williams & Winston, 1985). Increases in leadership skills, interpersonal communication skills (Bialek & Groves, 1998), decision-making skills (Cress et al., 2001) and academic success (Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994) are just some of the many benefits.

Leadership development programs provide similar benefits to participants (Cress et al., 2001; Strifolino & Saunders, 1989; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkardt, 1999). Leadership programs

aid students in their academic achievement (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989), and increased self- and other-awareness, both in college and beyond (CAS, 2003). Leadership programs, and most leadership experiences in general produce gains in leadership skills such as interpersonal skills, problem-solving, and cognitive development.

First-year leadership programs, or FYLPs, are a specific type of leadership development program targeted toward new students. With similar goals as general leadership programs, FYLPs are created with the special needs and interests of first-year students in mind (Peraza, 2004). These programs can encourage higher retention rates (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989), leadership skills (Outcalt, 2001), and ethical leadership (Peraza, 2004).

As important as FYLPs are to the development of first-year students, there has been little research on the effectiveness of FYLPs. Proper research and evaluation is imperative for the life of FYLPs in institutions. This study was designed to address this deficiency by exploring the outcomes and benefits of a specific FYLP.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of a first-year leadership program (FYLP) on the perceived improvement of leadership skills of its participants, as measured by the Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) (Vann, 2004). This one-semester FYLP was designed to develop students' understanding of leadership through their participation in an intentional learning environment based on community and growth, while building leadership skills. The FYLP also sought to provide positive role models with mentors, empower students as individuals, and to help them develop their leadership style. This FYLP at a midsized private institution in the Midwest employs a retreat at the beginning of the year, upperclassmen mentors, and bi-monthly workshops on topics such as ethics and integrity, power and conflict, and diversity as its primary program components. The FYLP also strongly encourages student organizational involvement as soon as students start the program.

A modified version of the SLOI (Vann, 2004) was given to the participants. This survey measures leadership skills in eight subcategories: self-management, interpersonal, problem-solving/decision-making, cognitive development/critical analysis, career development, organization and planning, self-confidence, and multicultural competencies. The researcher sought to find if FYLP participants have higher perceived improvement in leadership skills than non-FYLP participants.

Specifically, this study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. Do students who participate in FYLPs engage in more leadership activities than students who do not participate in FYLPs?

2. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills between FYLP participants one semester after completion of the program when compared to non-FYLP participants?
3. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills between FYLP participants one year after completion of the program when compared to non-FYLP participants?
4. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills between FYLP participants two years after completion of the program when compared to non-FYLP participants?
5. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills between FYLP participants three years after completion of the program when compared to non-FYLP participants?
6. Is there a significant difference in the perceived improvement of SLOI defined leadership skills of FYLP participants over time (i.e. Freshmen to Senior)?

This chapter examines the methodology that was used in the present study. This includes the sample selection process, the instrument that was employed in the study, and the data collection and analysis procedures used in the study.

#### Sample Selection

The population from which the sample was drawn includes students at a midsized private university in the Midwest. Target samples of participants were used in this study. The first sample included all first, second, third, and fourth year students enrolled in the 2005-2006 academic year that had completed the FYLP through the surveyed institution. There were 385 possible participants in this group. The second sample included all students who were registered

through the Office of Student Development at the university as one of the three top officers in their registered student organization (RSO). There were 524 possible participants in this group, but 39 of these emails matched the FYLP participant list as these FYLP students were also student organization officers. Therefore, there were 485 distinct email addresses, but there still may have been students on both lists, but with different email addresses for each list. Assuming that most FYLP participants would go on to hold leadership positions in student organizations, these samples were very similar. Non-student leaders were not chosen for participation in the non-FYLP control group because they would not have the same leadership experiences as those invited. Comparison to FYLP participants would not have yielded the information needed to determine if the FYLP gave its participants, students who are very motivated, an edge over those that did not participate but were still motivated enough to become involved in other leadership experiences.

The two samples of potential participants were invited to participate via an email message sent on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006. I worked with the Office of Student Development at the institution to endorse the study, to gain access to the email addresses of the FYLP participants, and to gain access to the listserv through which the non-FYLP participants were contacted. Two initial email messages were created, one for FYLP participants (see Appendix A) and one for non-FYLP participants (see Appendix B). These messages informed the participants that they had been selected to participate in a study about the leadership skills they had acquired because of their student leadership experiences. They were told that participating would entail completing a short online survey at their convenience. The email also mentioned that an incentive would be provided for their participation. If participants provided their email address after submitting the survey, they would be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 gift certificate to the university gift shop.

I also enlisted the help of administrators and students at the institution with whom I was familiar with to assist with increasing the response rate.

The initial email messages were sent February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006. After four days, a follow-up email was sent to all potential participants reminding them of the study (see Appendix C). A second follow-up occurred a little over one week after the initial email (see Appendix D). After two weeks, the survey was taken offline. The drawing for the prizes then took place, and the winning participants were notified of their prize. The gift certificates to the gift shop of \$50 were available in the Office of Student Development in the institution's union.

#### Instrumentation

The instrument I used to collect data on the leadership skills of FYLP and non-FYLP participants was a modified version of the Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) (Vann, 2004). While the SLOI was created to measure the leadership experiences of college students at a particular institution, modifications were made to reflect the leadership experiences of the students at the institution where this study was performed.

The modified SLOI consisted of 80 items. Each subscale asked participants to respond using a Likert-type scale between 1 and 6, 1 being "Strongly Disagree", and 6 being "Strongly Agree." A "N/A" or not applicable option was also included. The advisement section was removed due to lack of applicability to the study. The technology scale was removed because it was not the focus of this study. In addition, a question concerning pre-college leadership experiences was removed. Finally, three questions were added pertaining to the participant's involvement in the FYLP at the institution. A copy of the SLOI broken down into scales can be found in Table 1. A complete copy of the modified SLOI appears in Appendix E.

Table 1

*Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) Item Breakdown*

Scale	Item #	Item	
Leadership Experience*	1	Indicate your most significant student leadership experience at Marquette	
	5	What other student leadership experiences have you had at Marquette	
	70	Indicate the types of training in which you participated	
Self-Management	6	Ability to perform under pressure	
	7	Ability to learn from my mistakes	
	8	Ability to manage stress	
	9	Ability to balance personal, academic and professional life	
	10	Ability to manage my time	
	11	Ability to establish priorities	
	12	Ability to identify personal strengths and weaknesses	
	13	Ability to understand the consequences of my actions	
	14	Ability to actively listen (understanding feeling and content of conversation)	
	Interpersonal Skills	15	Ability to give constructive criticism to others
		16	Ability to receive constructive criticism from others
		17	Ability to express disagreement tactfully
		18	Ability to understand what is important to others
		19	Ability to influence others
20		Ability to motive other people	
21		Supervisory skills	
22		Professional working relationships with the opposite gender	
23		Public speaking skills	
24		Written communications	
25		Ability to work as part of a group	
26		Ability to identify strengths and weaknesses of others	
27		Ability to make formal presentations	
28		Ability to speak extemporaneously (unrehearsed)	
Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	29	Ability to diplomatically resolve conflict	
	30	Ability to negotiate for a desired outcome	
	31	Ability to creatively problem solve	
	32	Ability to make ethical decisions	
	33	Development of good judgment	

Cognitive Development/  
Critical Analysis

- 34 Calculated risk taking
- 35 Ability to critically examine my mistakes
- 36 Ability to practically apply knowledge/information
- 37 Ability to develop compromises
- 38 Ability to assess the politics associated with issues
- 39 Critical thinking skills
- 40 Ability to perform well in my future career
- 41 Development of transferable career skills
- 42 Skill development that will help me advance in my career
- 43 Overall learning experience
- 44 Preparation for post-graduate leadership opportunities

Organization and Planning

- 45 Ability to build consensus within a group
- 46 Ability to delegate tasks to others
- 47 Ability to promote/market events
- 48 Ability to plan activities/events
- 49 Ability to develop organization agendas
- 50 Ability to set deadlines
- 51 Ability to run effective meetings
- 52 Ability to manage organization finances
- 53 Ability to manage multiple tasks
- 54 Ability to form a team to accomplish a goal
- 55 Ability to lead a group of people
- 56 Ability to organize tasks
- 57 Ability to set long term goals
- 58 Ability to meet deadlines
- 59 Understanding of organizational politics

Self-Confidence

- 60 Self-confidence in my social skills
- 61 Self-confidence in my abilities
- 62 Assertiveness in my interactions with others
- 63 Ability to clarify my personal values
- 64 Establishing my personal code of ethics

Multicultural competencies

- 65 Sensitivity toward people who are different from me
- 66 Respect for the rights of others
- 67 Ability to appreciate different perspectives

Demographics

- 2 Indicate the type that best describes the organization you referred to in the question above
- 3 Estimate the average number of hours you spend per week in your single most important student leadership experience
- 4 Estimate the number of months to date in your single most important student leadership experience



	68	Average number of hours per week spent on ALL university-affiliated co-curricular activities this year
	69	Number of hours per week engaged in class work outside of class (include service-learning hours)
	72	Age
	73	Sex
	74	Class standing
	75	Ethnicity
	76	Current Cumulative College GPA
	77	Did you participate in STAR the first semester of your freshmen year
	78	If you responded yes to the previous question, did you receive a nomination for STAR or did you decide to apply without a nomination
Open ended	71	Please describe the most helpful leadership training experiences at Marquette and what you learned during the activity
	79	If you responded yes to question #77, please describe the effect your participation in STAR had on your leadership experiences at Marquette
	80	Use this space to make any additional comments about your general leadership experience

\*The author of this study created this category

Each of the eight scales in the SLOI was used to measure leadership skills of participants. A factor analysis was conducted to create the eight scales from a large sample of respondents when designing the survey (Foley, 2004).

In the first scale of the SLOI (self-management), participants were asked to rate their leadership skills related to self-management. Nine items in this section examined the participants' skills in such things as managing his or her time, priorities, and ability to balance personal, academic, and professional life.

In the second scale of the SLOI (interpersonal skills), participants were asked to rate their skills related to interpersonal interactions. Fifteen items in this section examined the participants' skills in motivating and influencing others, public speaking, and the ability to work as part of a group.

The third scale of the SLOI (problem-solving/decision making) contained five items that asked participants about their abilities in conflict resolution, ethical decision-making, and good judgment. Other items included abilities in negotiation and creative problem-solving.

Cognitive development and critical analysis composed the fourth scale of the SLOI. In this scale, six items included questions about the participant's abilities in critical thinking skills, risk taking, and learning from one's mistakes.

In the fifth scale of the SLOI (career development), participants were asked to respond to questions about career development and planning. There were five items in this section. The items in this scale inquired about how his or her leadership experiences influenced skills related to a future career. For example, the extent to which the leadership experiences contributed to the participant's ability to perform well in his or her career, and prepared the participant for post-graduate leadership opportunities were examined.

The sixth scale of the SLOI elicited information about the organization and planning skills of the participants because of their leadership skills. Fifteen items in this section examined abilities related to organization and planning. Respondents were asked about their ability to organize tasks, set long-term goals, meet deadlines, and run an effective meeting, among other items.

The seventh scale of the SLOI (self-confidence) considered the self-confidence of the participants. Five items asked participants about their assertiveness, and self-confidence in their social skills and abilities. Other items included clarification of personal values and establishing a code of ethics.

The eighth and final scale related to the participants' multicultural competencies. Three items were included in this scale. These three items requested information on the participants' abilities to respect others' rights, appreciate different perspectives, and show sensitivity to people who are different from themselves.

Demographic information was requested in three separate sections. Respondents were asked to include their sex, age, class standing, ethnicity, GPA, and status as a FYLP participant or non-FYLP participant. In addition, participants were asked about their leadership experiences in college. They indicated both their most important leadership experience in college, as well as indicated all experiences they have had, such as involvement in a student organization or a position as a Resident Advisor. Finally, a question pertaining to leadership training experiences was asked. These three questions constituted the Leadership Experiences category as seen in Table 1, and addressed the first research question in this study concerning total amount of leadership involvement.

## Validity and Reliability

Reliability of a survey instrument relates to the extent to which an instrument consistently measures responses when administered at different times or to different people (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Even though complete reliability statistics for the current version of the scales of the instrument were not completed before the study started, results for the original version showed internal consistency on the instrument as a whole, and on each of the scales. Each of the scales reported a .85 or higher for Chronbach's alpha (Foley, 2004). This shows that the SLOI is a reliable instrument.

Validity of an instrument relates to the extent the instrument measures what it intends to measure (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The current study used a survey that was originally reviewed by job recruiters to assess the items and their importance to the corporate world. Input was also gathered from student leaders and advisors of student organizations for face validity. The original SLOI was also pre-tested on various students in leadership programs and with various leadership experiences. Suggestions from these professionals and modifications based in the pilot test were incorporated to improve the face validity of the instrument (Foley, 2004).

## Data Collection Procedures

Permission was sought from the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at the institution with which I am associated prior to gathering the data. Approval was obtained (see Appendix F), and the sample was selected.

The plan for distributing the survey to students was discussed with the Assistant Dean of Student Development at the host FYLP institution, who agreed that the survey measured the goals of the program, even if the goals were not explicitly recorded. It was determined that an online administration of the instrument would increase response rate when compared to a paper

survey, and ease of administration as the study was created at an institution in a different state from the host institution. The Assistant Dean sent the email messages to the sample participants through the FYLP listserv and the listserv for non-FYLP participants. Students were sent one of two email messages (see Appendix A and Appendix B) that provided them information regarding the study. The email indicated the period of time for completion of the survey. A link was included at the bottom of the email that lead students to the informed consent page (see Appendix E), explaining the study further and requesting permission to use the information the student provided in the study.

At the bottom of the informed consent page was a link to the survey (see Appendix E). After completing the survey, participants were led to a web page thanking them for their participation, and explaining the optional entry into the prize drawing. A link was provided so participants could enter their email address into the drawing for the prize in a separate location from the survey. A reminder email message (see Appendix C) was sent five days after the first email to remind potential participants that the survey was still open. A second reminder email message (see Appendix D) was sent eight days after the first email to remind potential participants that the survey was still open. Informal attempts to gain higher response rate through other student and administrator contacts were made.

#### Data Analysis Procedures

Once all of the responses were received from participants, I analyzed the data. The data were downloaded from the online survey to Microsoft Excel and transferred to a Statistical Package from Social Science (SPSS) file. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

First, the data was coded for class standing (1=freshman, 2=sophomore, 3=junior, 4=senior, 5=fifth-year senior, 6=graduate student), and FYLP status (1=FYLP participant,

2=non-FYLP participant). Second, each of the research questions was addressed. I calculated these and all demographic frequencies for respondent groups for cross-validation.

The first research question focused on the difference between the amount of leadership activities a student engaged in if they have completed a FYLP than if they have not. To address this question, I calculated frequencies, mean scores, and standard deviation of answers for items #1, #5 and #70 concerning leadership activities and training. This provided me with information on the leadership experiences of the sample, and helped me discover the relationship between FYLP involvement and involvement in other leadership activities.

The second research question referred to the difference in perceived improvement of leadership skills of first-year FYLP and non-FYLP participants after just completing the program the prior semester. To answer this question, I compared the first-year FYLP and first-year non-FYLP composite leadership scores using mean scores for the two groups on each of the scales. T-tests were conducted to test for significant differences between the two groups. This process was repeated for the third, fourth, and fifth research questions with second-, third- and fourth-year students. Each question inquired about the difference in improvement of leadership skills between FYLP and non-FYLP participants. For the third research question, I compared second-year FYLP and second-year non-FYLP participants. For the fourth research question, I compared third-year FYLP and third-year non-FYLP participants. For the fifth research question, I compared fourth-year FYLP and fourth-year non-FYLP participants. All t-tests were conducted at the  $p < .05$  significance level.

The sixth research question referred to the difference in improvement of leadership skills between each of the FYLP classes. It sought to determine whether there was a between classes in the improvement of leadership skills of FYLP participants as they moved further from the FYLP

and into other leadership experiences in college. To answer this question, I conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to compare each of the FYLP classes against each other on each of the scales.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to examine the short and long-term effects of a FYLP on participants' leadership skills. The methodology described in this chapter was deemed sufficient to address the research questions posed in the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of the data analysis. The chapter is organized into two sections. The first section provides a description of the sample. The second describes the analysis of the data in relation to the research questions asked in this study.

#### Description of the Sample

A total of 265 participants completed surveys, a 30 % response rate, with 32 % of possible FYLP participants completing the survey, and 29 % of non-FYLP. In Table 2, the demographic characteristics of the sample are reported.

Approximately 70% of the participants were female and 30% were male. Approximately 15% of the participants were freshmen in college, 21% were sophomores, 25% were juniors and the largest group, seniors, constituted approximately 34% of the sample. There were also a few 5<sup>th</sup> year seniors and graduate students in the sample. Fifth year seniors were eliminated from the analysis because they would have been from a different FYLP class than traditional seniors if they participated. These last two groups amounted to 4.5% of the sample together, but were not used for comparison data since none of them completed the FYLP.

Lastly, FYLP participation information was requested. A little less than half (46%) of the total number of participants completed the FYLP in their first year, while 54% did not.

#### Results of the Study

##### *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics were calculated on the respondent group (i.e., means, standard deviation) for each of the eight scales on the SLOI. These can be seen in Table 3. Since each scale had a different number of questions, the minimum and maximum scores are different. For



Table 2

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 265)*

Characteristics	<i>N</i>	% <i>N</i>
<b>Sex</b>		
Male FYLP	39	14.7
Male Non-FYLP	40	15.1
Total	79	29.8
Female FYLP	84	31.7
Female Non-FYLP	102	38.5
Total	186	70.2
<b>Class</b>		
Freshmen		
FYLP	34	12.8
Non-FYLP	5	1.9
Total	39	14.7
Sophomore		
FYLP	32	12.1
Non-FYLP	24	9.1
Total	56	21.1
Junior		
FYLP	23	8.7
Non-FYLP	44	16.6
Total	67	25.3
Senior		
FYLP	34	12.8
Non-FYLP	57	21.5
Total	91	34.3
5th year senior <sup>+</sup>	3	1.1
Graduate student <sup>+</sup>	9	3.4

<sup>+</sup>Had no FYLP participants

Table 3

*Leadership Skills for Entire Sample (N = 265)*

Scale	min	max	mean	s.d.
Self-Management	16	48	40.16	5.16
Interpersonal Skills	23	90	73.47	9.64
Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	8	30	24.79	3.30
Cognitive Development/ Critical Analysis	12	36	29.28	3.90
Career Development	8	30	25.66	3.92
Organization and Planning	23	90	75.50	9.93
Self-Confidence	6	30	25.04	3.72
Multicultural Competencies	5	18	15.69	2.24

example, since multicultural competencies only had three questions, the lowest composite score for this scale for any participant was 5. In contrast, there were 14 questions for the interpersonal skills scale, with a minimum score of 23. Correlations were calculated to ensure reliability of survey items. The survey had a Cronbach alpha rating of .97, with each subscale rating varying between .82 and .93, making this survey very reliable.

### *Research Questions*

*Research question one: Leadership experience.* The first research question was to determine whether FYLP participants would differ from non-FYLP participants with respect to their leadership experiences. As shown in Table 1, three survey items addressed this question. A frequency count was generated based on participant responses to the three questions, e.g. participants would receive a count of 5 if they answered question 1 with one activity, question #5 with two leadership experiences, and question #70 with two training activities.

The mean performance for the FYLP group was 9.54 (*s.d.* 4.96) while the mean performance for the non-FYLP group was 8.26 (*s.d.* 4.25). Independent samples t-test revealed that there was a significant difference between the two groups,  $t(263)=2.29$ ,  $p=.03$ , at a  $p<.05$  significance level.

*Research question two: Leadership skills of freshmen based on FYLP status.* The second research question in this study was to discover differences in leadership skills between freshmen FYLP participants and freshmen non-FYLP participants. To address this question, a t-test was conducted on each of the eight scales, comparing composite scores of FYLP participants to the composite scores of non-FYLP participants. Each non-demographic question on the SLOI related to one of the eight scales, seen in Table 1, with responses of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly

agree). Independent samples t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups on any of the scales,  $p < .05$ . The results are summarized in Table 4.

*Research question three: Leadership skills of sophomores based on FYLP status.* The third research question in this study was to discover differences in leadership skills between sophomore FYLP participants and sophomore non-FYLP participants. To address this question, t-tests were conducted on each of the eight scales, comparing composite scores of FYLP participants to the composite scores of non-FYLP participants. Independent samples t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups on any of the scales,  $p < .05$ . The results are summarized in Table 5.

*Research question four: Leadership skills of juniors based on FYLP status.* The fourth research question in this study was to discover differences in leadership skills between junior FYLP participants and junior non-FYLP participants. To address this question, t-tests were conducted on each of the eight scales, comparing composite scores of FYLP participants to the composite scores of non-FYLP participants. Independent samples t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups on any of the scales,  $p < .05$ , but a significance level of .07 showed some difference on the problem-solving/decision making scale in favor of the FYLP group. The results are summarized in Table 6.

*Research question five: Leadership skills of seniors based on FYLP status.* The fifth research question in this study was to discover differences in leadership skills between senior FYLP participants and senior non-FYLP participants. To address this question, t-tests were conducted on each of the eight scales, comparing composite scores of FYLP participants to the composite scores of non-FYLP participants. Independent samples t-tests revealed that there was a significant difference between the two groups on the Multicultural Competencies scale. The .05

Table 4

*Results of T-tests on Differences in Leadership Skills of Freshmen by FYLP Status (N = 39)<sup>+</sup>*

Scale	FYLP Status	<i>n</i> <sup>+</sup>	<i>m</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-Management	FYLP	30	39.50	5.39	33	-.266	.792
	non-FYLP	5	40.20	5.89			
Interpersonal Skills	FYLP	28	70.39	11.77	30	-.381	.706
	non-FYLP	4	72.75	9.47			
Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	FYLP	30	24.33	3.22	33	-.178	.859
	non-FYLP	5	24.60	1.95			
Cognitive Development/ Critical Analysis	FYLP	31	29.03	3.54	33	1.010	.320
	non-FYLP	4	27.00	5.72			
Career Development	FYLP	31	26.16	3.72	34	1.748	.089
	non-FYLP	5	22.80	5.63			
Organization and Planning	FYLP	21	73.52	9.40	24	-.766	.451
	non-FYLP	5	77.00	7.55			
Self-Confidence	FYLP	33	25.94	2.98	36	-.187	.853
	non-FYLP	5	26.20	2.28			
Multicultural Competencies	FYLP	34	16.00	1.79	37	-.710	.482
	non-FYLP	5	16.60	1.52			

<sup>+</sup> n may not equal 39 due to missing data

\* significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

Table 5

*Results of T-tests on Differences in Leadership Skills of Sophomores by FYLP Status (N = 56)<sup>+</sup>*

Scale	FYLP Status	<i>n</i> <sup>+</sup>	<i>m</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-Management	FYLP	32	39.09	5.77	53	.052	.959
	non-FYLP	23	39.00	7.63			
Interpersonal Skills	FYLP	29	72.62	12.11	48	-.026	.979
	non-FYLP	21	72.71	13.28			
Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	FYLP	31	24.16	4.35	49	-.112	.912
	non-FYLP	20	24.30	4.31			
Cognitive Development/ Critical Analysis	FYLP	28	28.64	4.18	47	.017	.986
	non-FYLP	21	28.62	5.55			
Career Development	FYLP	31	24.84	4.50	50	.714	.479
	non-FYLP	21	23.86	5.36			
Organization and Planning	FYLP	27	72.30	13.36	43	-1.056	.297
	non-FYLP	18	76.22	10.22			
Self-Confidence	FYLP	30	24.13	4.64	51	-.195	.846
	non-FYLP	23	24.39	4.95			
Multicultural Competencies	FYLP	31	15.19	2.77	51	-.158	.875
	non-FYLP	22	15.32	2.91			

<sup>+</sup> n may not equal 56 due to missing data

\* significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

Table 6

*Results of T-tests on Differences in Leadership Skills of Juniors by FYLP Status (N = 67)<sup>+</sup>*

Scale	FYLP Status	n <sup>+</sup>	m	s.d.	df	t	p
Self-Management	FYLP	23	40.78	4.61	58	.677	.501
	non-FYLP	37	39.95	4.68			
Interpersonal Skills	FYLP	19	75.95	7.86	53	1.270	.209
	non-FYLP	36	72.72	9.47			
Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	FYLP	22	26.18	2.79	61	1.883	.065
	non-FYLP	41	24.61	3.34			
Cognitive Development/ Critical Analysis	FYLP	22	30.23	3.60	59	1.001	.321
	non-FYLP	39	29.26	3.66			
Career Development	FYLP	22	25.64	3.49	59	-.005	.996
	non-FYLP	39	25.64	3.45			
Organization and Planning	FYLP	16	75.81	7.74	47	.067	.947
	non-FYLP	33	75.61	11.06			
Self-Confidence	FYLP	22	24.95	3.75	61	-.046	.963
	non-FYLP	41	25.00	3.70			
Multicultural Competencies	FYLP	23	15.74	2.16	64	.157	.876
	non-FYLP	43	15.65	2.17			

<sup>+</sup> n may not equal 67 due to missing data

\* significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

significance level reveals that seniors that participated in the FYLP had a higher level of leadership skills in relation to multicultural competencies than students who did not participate in the FYLP. The results are summarized in Table 7.

*Research question six: Differences in leadership skills between classes.* The sixth and final question posed by this study was to discover differences in leadership skills across classes of FYLP participants. The question sought to discover if increased involvement in leadership experiences would change a student's perceived improvement of leadership experiences. Presumably, participants would engage in leadership experiences that would bolster their perceived improvement of leadership skills. To answer this research question, I conducted a univariate ANOVA test. No significant differences were found. Results can be seen in Table 8.



Table 7

*Results of T-tests on Differences in Leadership Skills of Seniors by FYLP Status (N = 91)<sup>+</sup>*

Scale	FYLP Status	<i>n</i> <sup>+</sup>	<i>m</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>																																																																																
Self-Management	FYLP	30	41.13	5.16	83	.381	.704																																																																																
	non-FYLP	55	40.75	4.08				Interpersonal Skills	FYLP	28	75.29	7.20	78	.336	.738	non-FYLP	52	74.73	7.00	Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	FYLP	31	25.06	3.00	83	-.194	.846	non-FYLP	54	25.19	2.61	Cognitive Development/ Critical Analysis	FYLP	31	29.61	4.10	82	.259	.797	non-FYLP	53	29.40	3.46	Career Development	FYLP	33	26.09	3.74	86	-.321	.749	non-FYLP	55	26.35	3.51	Organization and Planning	FYLP	26	74.77	8.57	70	-1.332	.191	non-FYLP	46	77.61	8.86	Self-Confidence	FYLP	34	25.74	3.37	89	1.251	.214	non-FYLP	57	24.82	3.56	Multicultural Competencies	FYLP	34	16.41	2.03	89	2.007	*.048
Interpersonal Skills	FYLP	28	75.29	7.20	78	.336	.738																																																																																
	non-FYLP	52	74.73	7.00				Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	FYLP	31	25.06	3.00	83	-.194	.846	non-FYLP	54	25.19	2.61	Cognitive Development/ Critical Analysis	FYLP	31	29.61	4.10	82	.259	.797	non-FYLP	53	29.40	3.46	Career Development	FYLP	33	26.09	3.74	86	-.321	.749	non-FYLP	55	26.35	3.51	Organization and Planning	FYLP	26	74.77	8.57	70	-1.332	.191	non-FYLP	46	77.61	8.86	Self-Confidence	FYLP	34	25.74	3.37	89	1.251	.214	non-FYLP	57	24.82	3.56	Multicultural Competencies	FYLP	34	16.41	2.03	89	2.007	*.048	non-FYLP	57	15.54	1.97								
Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	FYLP	31	25.06	3.00	83	-.194	.846																																																																																
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<sup>+</sup> n may not equal 91 due to missing data

\* significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

Table 8

*Results of An Analysis of Variance for Differences in Leadership Skills of FYLP Participants by Class (N = 123)<sup>+</sup>*

Scale	Class	<i>n</i> <sup>+</sup>	<i>m</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-Management	Freshmen	19	39.84	3.86	3	.674	.569
	Sophomore	20	39.70	4.46			
	Junior	14	41.50	5.11			
	Senior	21	40.81	5.25			
Interpersonal Skills	Freshmen	19	71.05	8.95	3	.598	.617
	Sophomore	20	73.70	13.85			
	Junior	14	76.29	8.27			
	Senior	21	76.19	7.41			
Problem-Solving/ Decision Making	Freshmen	19	24.21	3.47	3	1.651	.180
	Sophomore	20	24.60	4.84			
	Junior	14	26.86	2.91			
	Senior	21	24.81	2.89			
Cognitive Development/ Critical Analysis	Freshmen	19	29.00	3.79	3	1.296	.278
	Sophomore	20	28.35	4.72			
	Junior	14	31.00	3.72			
	Senior	21	29.24	4.27			
Career Development	Freshmen	19	25.63	3.50	3	1.508	.215
	Sophomore	20	25.30	4.88			
	Junior	14	26.36	3.78			
	Senior	21	25.86	4.11			
Organization and Planning	Freshmen	19	72.79	9.57	3	.426	.734
	Sophomore	20	72.90	15.51			
	Junior	14	76.79	7.81			
	Senior	21	75.05	8.40			
Self-Confidence	Freshmen	19	25.32	3.27	3	.746	.526
	Sophomore	20	24.30	4.99			
	Junior	14	25.14	4.35			
	Senior	21	25.62	3.54			
Multicultural Competencies	Freshmen	19	15.89	2.03	3	1.039	.377
	Sophomore	20	15.45	3.15			
	Junior	14	16.29	1.77			
	Senior	21	16.71	1.93			

\* significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

<sup>+</sup> n may not equal 123 due to missing data

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of a first-year leadership program (FYLP) on the perceived improvement of leadership skills of its participants, as measured by the Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) (Vann, 2004). This survey measures improvement in leadership skills in eight subcategories: self-management, interpersonal, problem-solving/decision-making, cognitive development/critical analysis, career development, organization and planning, self-confidence, and multicultural competencies.

This chapter provides a discussion of the study and its results. The relationship of those results to prior research, as well as the limitations of the study and implications for future practice, research, and policy is also discussed. Finally, conclusions about the study are made.

#### Discussion

##### *Research Question One: Leadership Experience*

The present study focused on a gap in current literature and practice by assessing a first-year leadership program. This was accomplished by asking six research questions pertaining to the skills a student should develop as a participant in a FYLP as measured by the SLOI (Vann, 2004). The first research question was to determine whether or not FYLP participants would differ from non-FYLP participants with respect to their level of involvement in leadership experiences. To answer this question, a composite was generated based on participant responses to the three questions in the Leadership Experiences category, e.g. if participants did not respond to question 5, they would receive a score of 0. Independent samples t-tests revealed that there was a significant difference between the two groups,  $t(263)=2.257, p=.03$ . This finding shows

that FYLP participants go on to engage in more leadership experiences than non-FYLP participants.

This finding is consistent with the assumptions of administrators of the FYLP at the institution, and with the open-ended responses to the survey. While these responses were not coded, a thorough review revealed that many of the students cite the program's encouragement toward student organization participation, as well as interactions with other future student leaders, as the greatest benefit of the program. While increased leadership experiences could be attributed to the self-starter attitude of the participants, some credit should be given to the program as the connections made with other future student leaders may provide more opportunities for students to become involved.

*Research Question Two: Leadership Skills of Freshmen Based on FYLP Status*

The second research question in this study was to discover differences in leadership skills between freshmen FYLP participants and freshmen non-FYLP participants. To address this question, t-tests were conducted on each of the eight scales, comparing composite scores of FYLP participants to the composite scores of non-FYLP participants. Each non-demographic question on the SLOI related to one of the eight scales, seen in Table 1, with responses of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Independent samples t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups on any of the scales,  $p < .05$ .

Interestingly, though, on more than one scale, non-FYLP freshmen scored higher than FYLP freshmen, even though the differences were not significant. For example, non-FYLPs scored higher than FYLPs on the self-management, interpersonal skills, problem-solving/decision making, organization and planning, self-confidence, and multicultural competencies scales. This could mean that the FYLP does not have the desired effect on

leadership skills since freshmen that did not participate in the FYLP scored higher on six of the eight scales than freshmen that just completed the FYLP. On the other hand, if those freshmen who did not complete the FYLP were one of the top three officers in their organization, whom the listserv targeted, they may be more accomplished self-starters than their FYLP counterparts.

The results of the freshmen research question must be viewed with some caution, though, for two reasons. First, this survey was administered only a few weeks after the FYLP program concluded. While the participants' answers to the survey may be at their purest since there are no other factors such as student organizational involvement to influence a student's improvement of leadership skills, these respondents have had the least amount of time than any group in the study to improve or reflect upon their leadership skills. Having little to no leadership experience beyond the FYLP, freshmen participants may not have fully examined where their leadership skills lie, nor had the chance to experience some leadership skills such as "public speaking skills," or "ability to manage organization finances."

Secondly, there were a very low number of non-FYLP freshmen that completed the survey. This was anticipated, as few freshmen would be one of the top three organizational officers that the non-FYLP listserv targeted. Gathering information on FYLP freshmen did provide useful for research question six, though, which will be discussed below.

### *Research Question Three: Leadership Skills of Sophomores Based on FYLP Status*

The third research question in this study was to discover differences in leadership skills between sophomore FYLP participants and sophomore non-FYLP participants. Similar to the second research question, the t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups on any of the scales.

Again, the non-FYLP sophomores scored higher on a few of the scales, such as interpersonal skills, problem-solving/decision making, career development, self-confidence and multicultural competencies, than the FYLP sophomores, but the differences are negligible. On the organization and planning scale, though, the non-FYLP group had a much higher mean (76.22), while the FYLP group had a lower mean (72.30) and a higher standard deviation (13.36). Although the differences on this scale were not significant [ $t(43) = -1.056, p = .297$ ], these results could tell us that non-FYLP sophomores improve more consistently on their leadership skills in organization and planning than their FYLP counterparts.

#### *Research Question Four: Leadership Skills of Juniors Based on FYLP Status*

The fourth research question in this study was to discover differences in leadership skills between junior FYLP participants and junior non-FYLP participants. The t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups on any of the scales.

For the first time, though, a low significance level of .07 was found on the problem-solving/decision making scale. In this case, though, the FYLP juniors had a higher mean (26.18 versus 24.61) than the non-FYLP participants, and had a lower standard deviation (2.79 versus 3.34), showing consistently higher scores on this scale. This could mean that FYLP participants learned better problem-solving and decision making skills as a result of their FYLP participation, or because of their increased participation in leadership experiences. Since the results are not significant, though, it could also be an anomalous occurrence.

#### *Research Question Five: Leadership Skills of Seniors Based on FYLP Status*

The fifth research question in this study was to discover differences in leadership skills between senior FYLP participants and senior non-FYLP participants. The t-tests revealed that there was a significant difference between the two groups on the multicultural competencies

scale. The .05 significance level reveals that seniors that participated in the FYLP had a higher level of leadership skills in relation to multicultural competencies than students who did not participate in the FYLP. The items on this scale, such as “sensitivity toward people who are different from me,” and “respect for the rights of others,” are important when considering the maturation of college students in the important area of diversity. In addition, the senior FYLP group had the highest mean score (16.41) on this scale than any of the other subgroups. The difference between the FYLP seniors and non-FYLP seniors could exist because the FYLP seniors were introduced to multicultural organizations through the FYLP or they may have internalized the workshop session on diversity. These inferences do not explain, however, why no significant differences were found for the other three classes, so the difference could be coincidental.

No other significant differences were found for this research question, although like their freshmen and sophomore counterparts, the non-FYLP seniors scored higher on the organization and planning scale, furthering the thought that the FYLP does not provide an advantage in this area.

#### *Research Question Six: Differences in Leadership Skills Between Classes*

The sixth and final question posed by this study was to discover differences in leadership skills across classes of FYLP participants. The question sought to discover if increased involvement in leadership experiences would change a student’s perceived improvement of leadership experiences. Presumably, participants would engage in leadership experiences that would bolster their improvement of leadership skills. To answer this research question, I conducted a univariate ANOVA test. Again, no significant differences were found.

An interesting trend did develop, though. While the differences were not significant, there were differences in mean scores between each of the classes on each of the scales. For the most part, leadership skills on each of the scales improved with time, but these mean scores peaked for the junior class on six of the eight scales. While this trend is confusing, as one would assume improvement in skills would peak at senior year, it could be due to the experiences of those particular classes. Since this study did not look at the same class over time, it is unwise to say they had the same experiences, or even went through the same FYLP curriculum since it is improved upon every year. Maybe the junior class is especially positive or had more positive experiences than the senior class. Alternatively, maybe the senior class is more realistic about how their leadership skills have improved, and did not inflate their scores as younger classes may have done. Lastly, it may be possible that seniors become less focused on leadership, disengaging from the activities and/or process of learning about leadership. Since the survey was not designed to understand these differences, I am unable to conclusively give a reason for the trend.

#### *Overall Observations*

While some differences were found on the perceived improvement of leadership skills between FYLP and non-FYLP juniors and seniors, the differences may mean nothing at all. Since there were no differences between freshmen and sophomore FYLP and non-FYLP participants, the few differences in their junior and senior year counterparts could be unrelated to FYLP status. It would be difficult to assume that the impact of FYLP involvement would remain latent until two years after participation. Since a significant difference was found for only one scale for one research question, we must conclude that the FYLP did not improve leadership



skills for its participants more than these skills would have improved within other leadership experiences.

Since the FYLP studied did not have documented learning objectives prior to this study, it was difficult to determine if the SLOI measured the intended goals of the FYLP, or even unintended goals. If the purpose of the FYLP was to increase the amount of leadership experiences in which students engage, then it accomplished its goal. However, if the goal of the FYLP was to increase the leadership skills of the participants more than leadership experiences alone could, then the FYLP may need to become more time intensive and incorporate more components. The students who participate in the FYLP would most likely go on to engage in leadership activities with or without the program, so the program would need to go beyond these experiences, providing a deep, richer, and more intense experience.

#### Relationship to Prior Research

It is helpful to examine this study in light of prior research. Because of the lack of significant differences in results in this study, though, there was no support for prior research.

Previous research shows that participants in leadership programs show more growth in their leadership abilities (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkardt, 1999). This study does not support these findings as there was no difference in the improvement of leadership skills between FYLP and non-FYLP respondents. The study's findings also do not support research that shows that leadership programs prepare students for leadership roles they play on campus (Janosik & Sina, 1988). While this study found that FYLP participants became more involved in leadership activities after FYLP participation, the study could not show whether that involvement was more effective than students who did not participate in the FYLP.

Prior research has shown that leadership skills such as self-awareness and the ability to work in a team were improved because of participation in a FYLP (Outcalt, 2001). This study does not support this finding, as those students that participated in the FYLP did not have significantly higher improvement in those areas over those that did not participate in the FYLP. Therefore, participation in a FYLP is not necessary to improve one's leadership skills as this can be achieved to the same level through other leadership activities such as student organization involvement.

Lastly, this study did not show support for research that indicated improvement in the eight scales in the SLOI was more likely to occur in FYLP participants (Cooper, Healy & Simpson, 1994; Cress et al., 2001; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkardt, 1999). While most research in this area compares FYLP participants with a sample that is not necessarily involved in other leadership activities such as the non-FYLP group in this study, the research does place emphasis on the benefits of leadership programs in spite of other experiences, something this study cannot do.

#### Limitations

Several limitations existed in this study. One related to response rate, specifically in regards to the freshmen response rate. While 34 freshmen from the FYLP group responded, only five non-FYLP freshmen responded. This is most likely due to the method used to recruit non-FYLP participants. To survey a group of students similar to the FYLP group in leadership experiences, emails were sent through a listserv used to communicate with the top three officers in every RSO. The chances of a freshman being on this listserv were small. At the same time, without as many opportunities to get involved as upperclassmen, non-FYLP freshmen may not be able to comment on the effects of leadership experiences on their leadership skills. Knowing

this, the main concern for gathering freshmen was for comparison data of FYLP participants across classes, which was achieved.

Another limitation was also related to the response rate. The overall response rate for this study was 30%, which is low. This could be due to students who were apathetic about their leadership experiences at the institution, or due to the fact that another leadership survey was distributed only a few weeks earlier. Those that responded could have differed from those that did not. This could have skewed the results.

A third limitation was related to the self-report nature of the survey. Since this study is based on the opinions students have on their own improvement of leadership skills, it may be relying too much on students who over- or under-estimate their leadership skills. If this occurred, then the scores on each of the scales may not have accurately measured the improvement of the participants' leadership skills. As student leaders tend to self-select themselves into leadership opportunities and come into college with an advantage because of activities in which they engaged during high school, over-inflation of leadership skills may be common, whether they participated in the FYLP or not. This may have decreased any differences between the two very similar groups.

A fourth limitation could also be connected to the survey. On the items that measured each of the eight scales on the survey, a "N/A," or not applicable option was provided. This was implemented in case participants had not performed certain leadership skills. In checking "N/A" in a certain item, though, participants' answers to that scale were not computed in the final scores because the lack of response would have thrown off data analysis tests that required a composite score of each scale. This would have skewed the results, especially as it decreased the response rate to a particular scale.

Lastly, one limitation was related to the population. One must also take into account that the students in the FYLP self-selected themselves into the FYLP, or showed such potential in the first few weeks of school to be nominated before they personally applied. Such students are more likely to engage in more leadership activities and gain more leadership skills as time progresses. At the same time, these students could just have a higher opinion of themselves and their abilities, either because of their involvement in the FYLP or because of their increased leadership responsibilities. Because of the impact of increased motivation, or misguided perceptions, the data they provided may not be reliable.

Despite these limitations, this study will be very beneficial to certain constituencies. It found evidence that contradicts most research on the impact of FYLPs, and can encourage administrators of FYLPs to assess and improve their programs.

#### Implications for Practice, Policy, & Research

The results of this study have implications for those involved in the leadership development of college students. Those that develop leadership formally through structured leadership programs, and those that advise unstructured leadership development opportunities through student organizations can utilize the findings of this study for their work. Students themselves could also benefit from this study.

Firstly, those that work with unstructured leadership development opportunities, such as serving as the advisor of a student organization, may use the results in their marketing and development of these activities. This study showed that students that participate in a FYLP go on to engage in more leadership activities than students that do not participate in a FYLP. Advisors of student organizations could market their organizations and opportunities to students who have just completed the FYLP. They could also encourage non-FYLP participants to become more

involved in a variety of opportunities, serving as a substitute for the positive impact on leadership engagement the FYLP has on its participants.

Secondly, for those that work closely with students through structured leadership development programs, especially first-year leadership programs, the results could influence the way they build and administer these programs. The results of this study were inconclusive. FYLP administrators may use this study, or similar ones, not only to perform their own assessments of their FYLPs, but also to build and maintain programs that incorporate more or different components than the study FYLP employed.

Another constituency that could benefit from the results of this study is freshmen students. This study informed us that students who participate in a FYLP do not have a significant improvement in their leadership skills over similar students who did not participate in the FYLP. Freshmen students could use this information in their decision whether or not to participate in a FYLP. Specifically, if a FYLP does not provide an extraordinary opportunity to improve one's leadership skills, students may want to become involved on their own, notwithstanding the social benefits of the FYLP.

The findings in this study could also benefit policymakers and current policies in higher education institutions. Specifically, the results could affect leadership requirements for students, the assessment and evaluation of current FYLPs, and the financial support of FYLPs.

Just as school administrators can require community service as a component for graduation, so too can requirements about leadership education exist. While there was no comparison data for students who were not leaders, the scores for both groups were very high, with all the means residing in the top 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the possible scores. This means that students who do participate in leadership activities have high levels of improvement in

leadership skills. Policymakers, when reviewing the results of this study, could see the high levels of improvement of leadership skills among the most active in an institution as impetus to require some sort of leadership activity for each student prior to graduation.

This study could also inform policymakers in their assessment and evaluation of FYLPs. This study showed that the students who participated in this FYLP did not have a marked improvement in their leadership skills over those that did not participate in the FYLP. Policymakers could embark on their own assessment and evaluation to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their FYLP, as the results here may not apply to their own programs (Schuh & Upcraft, 1998).

Another area in policy that could be affected by the results of this study is the financial support of FYLPs. This study demonstrated that FYLPs might not be as effective as desired in accomplishing the goal to build leadership skills in students. More funding could be allocated to the development of FYLPs to help ensure their success.

As this study addressed, future research is necessary to fill the gaps. There are a number of ways this goal could be achieved. For instance, to continue the research that has been conducted here, this study could be recreated at other institutions, which would consist of a different student population participating in a FYLP with different components.

Another possibility for research could expand on a technique that this study was unable to employ. This study compared two groups of students, one that had participated in a FYLP and one that had not, to observe differences in the improvement of leadership scores. The non-FYLP group consisted of the top three organizational officers of the institution's RSOs, assuming this group most closely resembled the FYLP group. Future research could instead employ matched pairing, ensuring that the FYLP group was in fact similar to the non-FYLP, further validating

results. Future research could also control for variables that this study did not, such as high school leadership experiences, socio-economic status, ethnicity or quality of leadership experiences in college.

Future research could also further validate the results of this study by performing a longitudinal study. Due to time constraints, the researcher chose to compare four different classes amongst each other to determine if there were changes in the participants' leadership scores over time. Another study could chose one class of FYLP participants and follow them throughout their four or five years in college to discover changes in participants' leadership scores over time. This technique could be combined with matched pairing to follow one class of both FYLP participants and non-FYLP participants more accurately.

Lastly, one way to improve this study could be with the use of qualitative techniques. This researcher employed quantitative techniques with a survey to gather results. For future research, interviews, focus groups or other qualitative techniques could more accurately measure improvement of leadership skills, and more importantly, pinpoint what led to this improvement.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from this study showed little to no difference in improvement of leadership skills between FYLP and non-FYLP participants. Besides increased involvement in other leadership opportunities and an improved social network, the FYLP made no difference in the improvement of leadership skills of its participants.

However, the fact that the study produced no positive significant findings about the FYLP could have been a result of a variety of different factors, such as an instrument that did not measure the true effects of the FYLP. Indeed, because the learning objectives of the FYLP were

vague and disconnected from each other, the SLOI may not have measured the right leadership skills or outcomes of the program.

In institutions of higher education, and student affairs departments in particular, assessment of leadership programs has not been a priority. As the trend toward assessment increases, so too should the assessment of these programs.

Before this study, little research addressed the assessment of a particular FYLP. This study fills this gap, and actually contradicts the research that did exist on the benefits of a leadership program. While the research that shows the benefit of leadership experiences as a whole could be true, research showing the importance of FYLPs on leadership skills is inconclusive when compared with this study.

In light of this study, leadership programs, FYLPs in particular, are in need of assessment and evaluation to ensure that they produce the results that are intended. What is important comes after this assessment, in the form of improving the experience.



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APPENDIX A:  
EMAIL TO FYLP SAMPLE

February 20, 2006

Dear former STAR participant,

We are writing to ask for your participation in a valuable research study being conducted by Mary Kate Havlik, a graduate student at Virginia Tech and 2004 Marquette alumnae. The study asks for you to comment on your experiences at Marquette since your participation in STAR, and how these experiences affected your leadership skills. This online survey will take no more than 10 minutes to complete, and will help the Office of Student Development improve the STAR and other leadership programs for you and future participants. Your identity will not be connected to your responses. Please complete the survey only once.

**Now, on to the benefits! In compensation for your participation in the survey, you have the option to be entered in a drawing to win a \$50 gift certificate to the MU Spirit Shop.**

Please click on or follow the link below, which will take you to a form further describing the survey. You will have until **Friday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>** to complete the survey. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Mary Kate at [marykate@vt.edu](mailto:marykate@vt.edu). Thank you in advance for your timely participation in this study!

Click on the link: [http://filebox.vt.edu/users/mhavlik/informed\\_consent\\_for\\_participants.htm](http://filebox.vt.edu/users/mhavlik/informed_consent_for_participants.htm)  
(You may have to copy and paste the link into your browser)

Sincerely,

Jon Dooley  
Assistant Dean of Student Development  
Marquette University

Mary Kate Havlik  
Graduate student, Higher Education and Student Affairs  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

APPENDIX B:  
EMAIL TO NON-FYLP SAMPLE

February 20, 2006

Dear campus leader,

We are writing to ask for your participation in a valuable research study being conducted by Mary Kate Havlik, a graduate student at Virginia Tech and 2004 Marquette alumnae. The study asks for you to comment on your organizational and leadership experiences at Marquette, and how these experiences affected your leadership skills. This online survey will take no more than 10 minutes to complete, and will help Student Development design leadership programs and improve current programs for you and future participants. Your identity will not be connected to your responses. Please complete the survey only once.

**Now, on to the benefits! In compensation for your participation in the survey, you have the option to be entered in a drawing to win a \$50 gift certificate to the MU Spirit Shop.**

Please click on or follow the link below, which will take you to a form further describing the survey. You will have until **Friday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>** to complete the survey. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Mary Kate at [marykate@vt.edu](mailto:marykate@vt.edu). Thank you in advance for your timely participation in this study!

Click on the link: [http://filebox.vt.edu/users/mhavlik/informed\\_consent\\_for\\_participants.htm](http://filebox.vt.edu/users/mhavlik/informed_consent_for_participants.htm)  
(You may have to copy and paste the link into your browser)

Sincerely,

Jon Dooley  
Assistant Dean of Student Development  
Marquette University

Mary Kate Havlik  
Graduate student, Higher Education and Student Affairs  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

APPENDIX C:  
FIRST FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

February 23, 2006

Dear student,

At the beginning of the week, we contacted you about a study we are conducting on your college leadership experiences. If you have already completed the online survey regarding those experiences, we thank you for your time. If you have not, we ask you again to please take a few minutes and complete this easy online survey.

By completing this survey, you are providing valuable research data which will be used to provide a better educational experience for future students.

**Of course, don't forget about the chance to win a \$50 gift certificate to the MU Spirit Shop.** All you need to do is fill out the survey by clicking on the link below. Thank you for your time.

After you are finished with the survey, please forward this on to other friends and members in your organization to give them a chance to impact future leadership development programs at Marquette.

Click on the link: [http://filebox.vt.edu/users/mhavlik/informed\\_consent\\_for\\_participants.htm](http://filebox.vt.edu/users/mhavlik/informed_consent_for_participants.htm)  
(You may have to copy and paste the link into your browser)

Sincerely,

Jon Dooley  
Assistant Dean of Student Development  
Marquette University

Mary Kate Havlik  
Graduate student, Higher Education and Student Affairs  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University



APPENDIX D:  
SECOND FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

February 28, 2006

Dear student,

This is your LAST chance to earn a chance to **win a \$50 gift certificate to the MU Spirit Shop!**

All you need to do is fill out a survey by clicking on the link below. The survey will take no more than 10 minutes to complete. If you have already completed the online survey regarding your leadership experiences, we thank you for your time. If you have not, we ask you again to please take a few minutes and complete this easy online survey. You have until March 3<sup>rd</sup> to fill out the survey and be eligible for the prize!

By completing this survey, you are providing valuable research data which will be used to provide a better educational experience for you and future students.

Thank you for your time.

Click on the link: [http://filebox.vt.edu/users/mhavlik/informed\\_consent\\_for\\_participants.htm](http://filebox.vt.edu/users/mhavlik/informed_consent_for_participants.htm)  
(You may have to copy and paste the link into your browser)

Sincerely,

Jon Dooley  
Assistant Dean of Student Development  
Marquette University

Mary Kate Havlik  
Graduate student, Higher Education and Student Affairs  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

## APPENDIX E:

### COMPLETE SURVEY INFORMATION

#### Informed Consent for Participants

Welcome to this online survey. You are being asked to comment on your leadership skills and leadership experiences that you have had at Marquette. There are 80 items total.

By clicking the survey link below, or copying and pasting it into your browser, you will be taken to the only survey, where you will need to complete the questions asked of you. Directions are given for each section. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Once you have completed the survey, all you need to do is hit “submit.” You will then be taken to a page that will give you a chance to enter a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate for the MU Spirit Shop, which will be awarded once the survey has closed. You will enter in your email address, and be emailed if you are a winner. You will be notified by March 17, 2006 if you are a winner.

Your answers will remain confidential throughout the survey. If you choose to enter the prize drawing, your email will not be connected to your responses.

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at both Marquette University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

By clicking on the following link, you voluntarily agree to participate in this study and completely fill out the survey questions asked.

<https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1125366196798>

(You may have to copy and paste the link into your browser)

## Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory

Please take about 10 minutes to complete this survey about your leadership experiences. The information you provide will be used to evaluate leadership programs and experiences at Marquette. Your individual responses will be kept confidential. In appreciation for helping out, you can choose to be entered into a random drawing for a **\$50 gift certificate to the MU Spirit Shop** by completing the survey before March 3, 2006. Thank you for participating!

### 1. Indicate your most significant student leadership experience at Marquette.

- Member of a student organization
- Officer in a student organization
- Officer in a Social Fraternity/Sorority
- MUSG Senator or Program Board member
- Member of a club or varsity athletic team
- Volunteer in a community service organization
- Program Assistant/Intern for a campus department
- Resident Assistant
- Peer Educator
- Orientation staff member (GDL, OA, PA)
- Student employee manager
- Major event board or planning team member (Winter Flurry, Senior Week, etc.)
- Hunger Clean-Up team leader or planning team member
- MAP trip leader or participant
- Group project leader in a class
- Teaching/Research Assistant
- Committee Chair in a student organization or university committee/task force
- Committee Member in a student organization or university committee/task force
- Retreat Leader (University Ministry)
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Indicate the type that best describes the organization you referred to in the question above.

- Academic and Professional (e.g. Math Club, Go-Getters, Academic Fraternities)
- Club and Recreational Sports
- Varsity sports
- Community Service and Social Awareness
- Graduate
- Honors Society (e.g. Alpha Sigma Nu, NRHH)
- Multicultural (e.g. Black Student Council, RAICES)
- Performing Arts (e.g., singing group/drama, band)
- Political (e.g., College Democrats, College Republicans)
- Social Fraternity/Sorority
- Special Interest (e.g. Chess Club, Running Club, Super Fan Club)
- Spiritual and Religious

- Student Government and Coordinating Councils
- Student Media and Publications
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Estimate the average number of hours you spend per week in your single most important student leadership experience.**

1 2 3 4 5 6  $\geq 7$

**4. Estimate the number of months to date in your single most important student leadership experience.**

0-3 4-6 7-12 13-24 >24

**5. What other student leadership experiences have you had at Marquette? Check all that apply.**

- Member of a student organization
- Officer in a student organization
- Officer in a Social Fraternity/Sorority
- MUSG Senator or Program Board member
- Member of a club or varsity athletic team
- Volunteer in a community service organization
- Program Assistant/Intern for a campus department
- Resident Assistant
- Peer Educator
- Orientation staff member (GDL, OA, PA)
- Student employee manager
- Major event board or planning team member (Winter Flurry, Senior Week, etc.)
- Hunger Clean-Up team leader or planning team
- MAP trip participant
- Group project leader in a class
- Teaching/Research Assistant
- Committee Chair in a student organization or university committee/task force
- Committee Member in a student organization or university committee/task force
- Retreat Leader (University Ministry)
- Other (please specify)

**Think about the skills and attributes you improved upon as a result of your leadership experiences at Marquette. Respond to each item by indicating your level of agreement.**

For each statement, choose from a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 = "Strongly Disagree"; 2 = "Disagree"; 3 = "Somewhat Disagree"; 4 = "Somewhat Agree"; 5 = "Agree"; and 6 = "Strongly Agree." Answer whether you agree or disagree that you improved upon each item.

As a result of my leadership experiences at Marquette, I improved upon my:

6. Ability to perform under pressure 1 2 3 4 5 6 n/a

7. Ability to learn from my mistakes 1 2 3 4 5 6 n/a

8.	Ability to manage stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
9.	Ability to balance personal, academic and professional life	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
10.	Ability to manage my time	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
11.	Ability to establish priorities	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
12.	Ability to identify personal strengths and weaknesses	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
13.	Ability to understand the consequences of my actions	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
14.	Ability to actively listen (understanding feeling and content of conversation)	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
15.	Ability to give constructive criticism to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
16.	Ability to receive constructive criticism from others	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
17.	Ability to express disagreement tactfully	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
18.	Ability to understand what is important to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
19.	Ability to influence others	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
20.	Ability to motive other people	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
21.	Supervisory skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
22.	Professional working relationships with the opposite gender	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
23.	Public speaking skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
24.	Written communications	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
25.	Ability to work as part of a group	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
26.	Ability to identify strengths and weaknesses of others	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
27.	Ability to make formal presentations	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
28.	Ability to speak extemporaneously (unrehearsed)	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
29.	Ability to diplomatically resolve conflict	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
30.	Ability to negotiate for a desired outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

31.	Ability to creatively problem solve	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
32.	Ability to make ethical decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
33.	Development of good judgment	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
34.	Calculated risk taking	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
35.	Ability to critically examine my mistakes	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
36.	Ability to practically apply knowledge/information	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
37.	Ability to develop compromises	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
38.	Ability to assess the politics associated with issues	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
39.	Critical thinking skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
40.	Ability to perform well in my future career	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
41.	Development of transferable career skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
42.	Skill development that will help me advance in my career	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
43.	Overall learning experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
44.	Preparation for post-graduate leadership opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
45.	Ability to build consensus within a group	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
46.	Ability to delegate tasks to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
47.	Ability to promote/market events	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
48.	Ability to plan activities/events	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
49.	Ability to develop organization agendas	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
50.	Ability to set deadlines	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
51.	Ability to run effective meetings	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
52.	Ability to manage organization finances	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
53.	Ability to manage multiple tasks	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

54.	Ability to form a team to accomplish a goal	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
55.	Ability to lead a group of people	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
56.	Ability to organize tasks	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
57.	Ability to set long term goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
58.	Ability to meet deadlines	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
59.	Understanding of organizational politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
60.	Self-confidence in my social skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
61.	Self-confidence in my abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
62.	Assertiveness in my interactions with others	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
63.	Ability to clarify my personal values	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
64.	Establishing my personal code of ethics	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
65.	Sensitivity toward people who are different from me	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
66.	Respect for the rights of others	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
67.	Ability to appreciate different perspectives	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

**68. Average number of hours per week spent on ALL university-affiliated co-curricular activities this year (student organizations, band, community service, campus ministry):**  
1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 >25

**69. Number of hours per week engaged in class work outside of class (include service-learning hours):**  
1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 >25

**The next set of questions pertains to the leadership training experiences in which you participated at Marquette. Please answer the following questions in reference to your leadership development.**

**70. Indicate the types of training in which you participated. Check all that apply.**

- Advanced leadership program/experience
- Culture/diversity enhancement programs
- Emerging leaders program (program for new leaders on campus, especially freshmen)
- For-credit leadership development course
- Leadership certificate series (participate in a series of seminars and earn leadership certification)
- Non-credit leadership development seminars
- On the job training
- Outdoor leadership education trips (adventure education)
- Conference/Symposium
- Ropes course
- Workshops
- Sessions held during organization meetings
- Student organization officer workshops
- Weekend leadership development retreats
- One-on-one interactions with another individual (e.g. Advisor, Mentor)
- Other (please specify)
- Have not participated in any leadership development activities

If you did not participate in any leadership training activities, skip the next question and continue with question 72.

**71. Please describe the most helpful leadership training experiences at Marquette (e.g., type of learning workshop on campus, retreat with organization, Women's Leadership Conference, Manresa Leadership Conference, Leadership Summit, academic course) and what you learned during the activity.**

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**The next set of questions is for demographics.**

**72. Sex:**

Male Female

**73. Age:**

under 18 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25-30 >30

**74. Class Standing:**

freshman sophomore junior senior 5th year senior graduate student other:



**75. Ethnicity (Check all that apply):**

African American/Black Asian/Pacific Islander Caucasian/White Hispanic Native American other:

**76. Current Cumulative College GPA:**

<2.0 2.0-2.499 2.5-2.99 3.0-3.499 3.5-4.0 I don't know

**77. Did you participate in STAR the first semester of your freshmen year?**

Yes  
No

**78. If you responded yes to the previous question, did you receive a nomination for STAR or did you decide to apply without a nomination?**

Received nomination  
Applied without nomination  
N/A

**79. If you responded yes to question #77, please describe the effect your participation in STAR had on your leadership experiences at Marquette, whether positive or negative. Feel free to talk generally about your experiences. You do not have to mention your organization(s) specifically.**

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**80. Use this space to make any additional comments about your general leadership experience.**

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[SUBMIT] – LINK TO THANK YOU PAGE

# THANK YOU!

Thank you very much for your participation in this study. If you wish to enter the drawing for a \$50 gift certificate to the MU Spirit Shop, follow the link below or copy and paste it into your browser and type in your email. The email will only be used to select and notify the winner. Your individual responses will be kept confidential. Winners will be chosen at random, and will be informed of their prize via email. The prize will be available for pick up in the Office of Student Development on the first floor of the Alumni Memorial Union on March 17.

*If you have any questions, contact Mary Kate Havlik at [marykate@vt.edu](mailto:marykate@vt.edu).*

<https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1139694973308>

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APPENDIX F:  
IRB APPROVAL


**Institutional Review Board**

Carmen Green  
IRB Administrator  
Research Compliance Office  
1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006(0497), Blacksburg, VA 24061  
Office: 540/231-4358; FAX: 540/231-0959  
email: [ctgreen@vt.edu](mailto:ctgreen@vt.edu)

DATE: October 3, 2005

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Steven M. Janosik ELPS 0302  
Mary Kate Havlik Educationl Leadership and Policy Studies 0302

FROM: Carmen Green 

SUBJECT: **IRB Exempt Approval:** "An Assessment of a First-Year Leadership Program"  
IRB # 05-587

I have reviewed your request to the IRB for exemption for the above referenced project. I concur that the research falls within the exempt status. Approval is granted effective as of October 3, 2005.

Virginia Tech has an approved Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00000572, exp. 7/20/07) on file with OHRP, and its IRB Registration Number is IRB00000667.

cc: File

Department Reviewer: Jan K. Nespor