

**GIVING BACK AND DEVELOPING CONNECTIONS:
SUPPORTS FOR SELF-DETERMINATION AND INITIATIVE
IN A COLLEGE LEADERSHIP GROUP**

A Thesis

by

MARTHA GARCIA OPERSTENY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2008

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

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December 2008

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

ABSTRACT

Giving Back and Developing Connections:

Supports for Self-Determination and Initiative

In a College Leadership Group. (December 2008)

Martha Garcia Opersteny, B.S., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Clifton E. Watts Jr.

The developmental period of adolescence typically refers to the years between 13 and 19, and is associated with developmental tasks that help youth become young adults. The transition to adulthood is typically recognized by common adulthood benchmarks such as leaving home, finishing school, marriage, financial independence and having children. However, many young men and women attending college remain financially and emotionally dependent on their parents, as they have not entered the professional work ranks and are faced with the challenges of college. Increasingly, colleges and universities are becoming places to help teach young people to become prepared for the professional ranks and engaged with the world that surrounds them. However, very little research in higher education is focused on the developmental benefits associated with the college experience. The purpose of this study was to examine the presence of developmental supports for self-determination and initiative in a student leadership program. Throughout the youth development literature, self-determination and initiative

are recognized as important internal capacities that aid young people as they transition to adulthood. These concepts provide the theoretical lens for a qualitative case study of a college leadership group. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, a year end focus group, and supplemented by a review of the organizational instruments and tools they develop. Findings from this study confirm past studies of youth development organizations and extend this work by applying it to the developmental period of emerging adulthood. For the leadership group under investigation, initiative and self-determination were supported primarily through the actions of peers within the group. The experience of student leaders often shaped how the group was led, and these leaders became an important source of support for the basic needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy within the group. The study covers a three-year period, and contrasts how peer leadership changed and impacted group functioning and performance over time. Practical implications of the study relate to the important role of faculty and graduate student advisors in training and monitoring student leaders before these individuals take a formal leadership role for these groups.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents, especially my dad, Deacon Louis Garcia, Sr. who passed away five years ago before my dream to attend graduate school was realized. Dad was almost sixty years old when he went back to school as he studied to become a deacon. He was always respected, however, during this three year process he grew as a leader in our community. Dedicating himself to the education of the young people in our church, he would be the first to say, “You are never too old to learn”.

And to my loving and faithful dog, Buster, may he rest in peace.

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Lei, Chris, Kyle and Jamie I enjoyed getting to interact with you all, your feedback was always helpful and I can't wait to see you all succeed in making this world a better place for young people.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is considered a time of great change in the social, emotional, and physical life of a young person (Larson, 2000). This period of transition from childhood to adulthood varies from culture to culture, however, in the United States it usually refers to the teenage years from 13 to 19 with some researchers extending this as late as 21 years old (Lerner & Barton, 2000). This time period typically begins with biological changes commonly associated with the onset of puberty. Social-emotional development is also clearly evident as youth begin to distance themselves from parents, while gravitating more toward relationships with peers and seeking independence (Steinberg, 2001). While puberty is a practical and overt marker for the start of this developmental period, the end of adolescence and transition to adulthood is not as clear.

The transition to adulthood is typically recognized by common adulthood benchmarks such as leaving home, finishing school, marriage, financial independence and having children. However, the reality for many young men and women in their twenties is that they remain financially and emotionally dependent on their parents; especially those attending colleges and universities (Furstenberg, et al 2003, Arnett, 1998). In 2003, approximately 13.4 million students were enrolled in undergraduate studies at US colleges and universities (U.S. Census, 2005). Considering the enrollment and the amount of time spent at these institutions, the college experience has become increasingly one that is developmentally significant (Arnett, 2000).

This thesis follows the style and format of the *Journal of Leisure Research*.

College is a time when youth have their first experiences of living away from home and the direct influence of parents. For many, it is a period for learning and practicing decision-making skills that will affect the rest of their lives (Arnstein, 1980, Kenny & Rice, 1995). It is also a time that offers a prolonged period of independence for the developmental tasks of identity exploration and experimentation with adult roles. Reflecting its developmental significance, Arnett (2000) identifies college as one of the primary cultural contexts for the period known as *emerging adulthood*.

Emerging adulthood (approximately from age 18 to 25), like adolescence, is a period of life that is culturally constructed (Arnett, 2000). In outlining the theoretical basis for emerging adulthood, Arnett (2000) cites Erikson's stages of psychosocial development and the prolonged period of adolescence that typify industrialized societies. This period is especially important for identity development as it offers a psychosocial moratorium or a period of relative freedom to explore one's identity and experiment with roles in an effort to construct one's identity (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). Consistent with identity development, Arnett also cites Levinson's (1978) research emanating from interviews with men at midlife to inform his conceptualization of emerging adulthood.

Levinson identified the period between the years of 17 and 33 as one where experimentation and the search for stability simultaneously occur. Levinson identified this as the *novice phase* for development (Arnett, 2000; Levinson, 1978). The *novice phase* is marked by bouts of instability and change where one explores the possibilities in love and work, and is akin to the role experimentation found during the psychosocial moratorium described by Erikson, and Keniston's theory of youth (Arnett, 2000;

Keniston, 1971). What is consistent about all three theories referenced by Arnett, is that emerging adulthood exists when societies provide the support for this process of exploration to occur. In Western societies, going off to college and living away from parents are conditions that allow youth to learn how to make decisions for themselves, accept responsibility for their actions, and, eventually, become financially independent. College also allows for these tasks to coincide with a relatively unfettered and intense period of identity exploration that is typical of this developmental stage.

The college years are a time where young people experience growth in knowledge and understanding, and learn to use reason and evidence in formulating decisions and actions that help them solve problems or reach desired goals (Kenny & Rice, 1995). As the college years pass, college students become less dependent on their parents with a better sense of control over their lives and how they can affect the world around them (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). While relationships with faculty and taking classes promote this growth, there are several experiences within the college years that allow emerging adults to encounter others, practice job skills, and develop competencies that translate well into adulthood. Among these experiences are student activity groups and programs where college students learn to function within groups who are typically committed to a broad mission of community service.

As an example, the Department for Student Activities at Texas A&M University (2008) documents that over 800 recognized student organizations exists on the university campus. Many of these organizations were created to develop leadership and community service opportunities to serve the university, disciplines within the university, and the

surrounding communities of Bryan and College Station. These opportunities are often student-led with very little administrative oversight, and require students to drive the format and function of these organizations.

Student organizations at colleges and universities are very similar to Larson's (2000) description of structured activities for adolescents, as they are often performed out of personal choice and require young people to adhere to a set of rules that are freely accepted and recognized by the individuals within these activities. Structured activities are widely recognized as valuable experiences to enriching development and aiding in the transition to adulthood (Mahoney, Larson & Eccles, 2005). Student organizations within colleges and universities become important sources for promoting positive youth development, as they allow students to freely choose intrinsically rewarding experiences in a context that is supportive and outside the typical structure of society. In the literature, positive youth development is often used to describe experiences that promote development throughout adolescence, however, the notion of emerging adulthood extends this period, and by association, include experiences to which young people are exposed in college.

Positive youth development describes the processes that support, develop and promote the successful transition to adulthood (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). It describes how youth develop internal capacities (e.g., becoming autonomous, learning initiative) that transfer into adulthood, and the roles that people, places, agencies and organizations play in development. Positive youth development also refers to professional practice and ethics that promote skills and abilities for preparation and

engagement in adulthood (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003). Pittman (1993) defines youth development as:

“...the ongoing growth process in which all youth are engaged in attempting to (1) meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded, and (2) to build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives.” (p. 8).

Prepared adolescents enter adulthood with new energy and ideas that serve to revitalize society and its institutions (Larson, 2002). It is for these reasons that much of today’s research in positive youth development is oriented to understanding how opportunities and programs engage youth and enhance academic and social learning. Developing best practices, learning lessons and understanding how programs support youth development are all functions of research, and can aid those who face the challenge of preparing youth for adulthood and its ensuing roles.

When considering positive youth development, Larson (2000) contends that structured activities and programs become practice grounds for developing initiative. Often times, structured activities require young people to face and persevere through challenges in an effort to complete tasks associated with those activities and realize goals. Larson theorizes that repeated exposure to and endurance through these types of challenges lead to the development of initiative, whereby one learns to endure through challenges and difficult times to reach goals. Larson advocates that initiative is an important internal capacity that serves individuals well throughout adulthood, as many

of the tasks adults face in the working world require the ability to work through difficult times while staying directed toward a goal.

One of the conditions necessary for developing initiative is that activities must be intrinsically motivating or self-determined. Activities that are not intrinsic in nature or not personally significant lack the internally motivating qualities that allow people to persist through challenge (Larson, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). These ideas are closely aligned with Ryan & Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and specifically the process of internalization outlined in the SDT subtheory, organismic integration theory (OIT).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) outlines the conditions under which behaviors are performed. Behaviors are self-determined when the basic needs of autonomy (e.g., choices and control), competence (e.g., feeling capable), and relatedness (i.e., positive relationships and connectedness to others) are met. Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) describes the process of internalization, which like initiative, is something that occurs with repeated exposure and serves a vital role in adulthood (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Internalization describes a process whereby behaviors which are initially externally motivated (e.g., done to gain rewards or avoid punishment) become internally regulated or self-determined as basic needs are supported. When the need for relatedness is met, individuals act introjectedly or act to avoid anxiety associated with inaction based on some adopted more or value. When the needs for relatedness and competence are met, individuals will likely act out of identification with the activity. That is, the individual has adopted the behavior and associates this behavior with his or her identity, "I am

good at golf; my friends golf; I am a golfer.” The highest degree of internalization is integration where autonomy, relatedness and competence are supported. Integrated regulation occurs when one identifies and associates the values and behaviors related with the activity to the self. The distinction between integrated regulation and intrinsic motivation is that activities motivated by the former are performed because it aligns with one’s identity and values, where the latter is associated with the behavior itself or performance for its own sake. Learning to internalize behavior, like initiative, is developmentally important because youth find meaning and value behaviors that are not initially appealing—an ability that leads to success for many adults in their working and personal lives.

Synthesizing several studies of classroom teaching and parenting, Grolnick, Deci and Ryan (1997) state that these contexts support self-determined behavior when they support autonomy and relatedness, and structure settings to help youth feel competent. Autonomy is supported when parents and teachers offer youth opportunities for choices and control, and promote decision-making and independence from adults. Relatedness is supported in situations where adults are perceived as caring and inclusive, and strive to connect with youth by explaining their actions, providing resources and stating expectations about how youth will perform or act in free time (Hutchinson, Caldwell, & Baldwin, 2003). Structuring experience for competence often takes place through monitoring behavior, stepping forward or assisting as needed, and making sure that youth feel supported to succeed. These same behaviors align well with the work of Larson and his colleagues (2005). Studies of youth structured activities have identified

roles that adult leaders play in supporting environmental conditions that promote initiative, and are congruent with studies of contexts that promote self-determination (Hansen & Larson, 2007; Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Often, adult leaders provide what Larson and his colleagues (2005) describe as intermediate structures. Intermediate structures support youth through challenges and compensate for developing capacities associated with development (Larson et al., 2005). Youth benefit most from experiences where adults facilitate youths' autonomy through leadership experiences within activities. During these periods of youth leadership, adept adult leaders balance the need to intervene in support with allowing youth to face tough situations and overcome challenges. Larson et al. called for intervention by adult leaders when youth stalled in their progress or were disorganized, and to take a step back when youth appeared to be managing situations and working through difficult times. In these cases, adult leaders allowed youth to generate solutions and provided support to youth when they needed it most.

Statement of the Problem

The work of Larson and his colleagues, and Ryan, Deci and their colleagues have clear implications for practice with youth—particularly adolescents. Programs and activities for college-aged youth or emerging adults have not received the same attention. However, in Western societies, young people are immersed in a context that allows for continued development and preparation for adulthood. With the number of youth attending college increasing and the period between childhood and adulthood becoming prolonged, there is a need to support youth development opportunities that

help facilitate the goals of developing prepared and engaged adults (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003). Frequent exposure to these types of experiences along with guidance from valued others can lead youth to long-term, positive development and civic engagement (Lerner, 2004). Preparing emerging adults in college through opportunities that enhance their senses of relatedness, competence, and autonomy can empower them to those first steps towards adult roles and responsibilities (Ryan & Deci, 2000, Larson, 2000). Given the relative freedom that emerging adults have in selecting and participating in programs, it would appear that these individuals experience truly self-determined behavior with their involvement in student clubs and organizations within universities. Larson (2000) identifies self-determined, structured activities as contexts for developing initiative, or the internal capacity to persist through challenges over time. Student clubs and organizations offer many challenges for their members as these groups tend to focus the goals of service to the university, a particular academic discipline, and the communities that surround these institutions. Some of these activities may not be initially appealing to all members, which brings to light the process of how students internally regulate their motivation to work through activities and internalize activities to the self. Working through challenges and finding personal meaning are two important capacities that help emerging adults later in adulthood, and are often tested and developed within these structured experiences.

With these ideas in mind, the purpose of this study was to examine the presence of developmental supports for self-determination and initiative in a student leadership program. The program under investigation exists at a major university in the

Southwestern United States. This program brings together students and prepares them for leadership roles in an academic department and to a broader university student body population. The intent of this research was to understand how this leadership group supports students to persevere through challenges and find personal meaning in the work associated with this group. Analyses were performed with the intent of informing youth development practitioners, especially those charged with developing meaningful programs for college students.

Research Questions

This project examined the available opportunities and environments that are needed to develop self-determination and initiative—two important developmental tasks associated with the transition to adulthood. The study's focus emanated from these research questions:

- 1) Why do leadership council members join and continue with the leadership council?
- 2) How does the context of a leadership council support autonomy, competence and interpersonal relatedness?
- 3) What experiences within the leadership council detract from self-determination and initiative?

These research questions were explored through the use of qualitative methods including personal interviews with members and observation of members' formal and informal activities associated with the leadership group, which was a program initiated under a university-wide directive to develop more leadership development opportunities

for students. The interviews sought information from members about their personal reasons and motivation for joining this student organization. This study also sought to determine whether the organizational interactions and associated projects that occurred with the leadership group provided opportunities to support autonomy, competence and interpersonal relatedness. Observations of weekly student leadership group meetings and other group activities were used in conjunction with data from interviews to triangulate information and identify those conditions under which initiative and self-determination were supported. This study also sought to identify a series of best practices that could be applied to similar college programs.

Significance of the Study

The role of colleges and universities in preparing emerging adults for adult roles and responsibilities is significant when one considers the number of youth attending and the duration of time these individuals spend at these institutions. Many colleges and universities recognize their role in preparing students for adulthood and have become more intentional about preparing youth to be leaders and successful in life. This research seeks to inform administrators, supervisors and students involved with these programs, and contribute to the positive youth development literature by identifying practices that support emerging adults involved in these programs.

Definition of Terms

Emerging Adulthood: Arnett (2000) identified emerging adulthood as a developmental period that is distinct from adolescence and adulthood in Western

societies that allow for delayed entry into the professional work force with dependence on parents. College students typify Arnett's description of emerging adults.

Initiative: Larson (2000) describes initiative as persistence through challenge over a temporal arc. Descriptions of challenges emerge from interviews with participants and are observed in meetings of the student organization. How these challenges were negotiated (continued engagement vs. disengagement from behavior) operationalized initiative in this study.

Internalized Motivation: Refers to self-determined behavior. Watts and Caldwell (2008) identify internalized forms of motivation as engaging in behaviors for their own sake (intrinsic motivation) or those behaviors regulated by personally relevant, internal motives that regulated behavior.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the literature pertaining to this study of supports for self-determination and initiative within a college leadership group. The chapter covers three major sections. Section one reviews Adolescence and Human Development and provides an overview of adolescence with focus on emerging adulthood. Section two provides the theoretical basis for the study, and focuses specifically on Social-Ecological Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and the concept of initiative. The final section reviews the literature on the role of structured activity programs in youth development with particular attention to the role of programs and services for college students.

Adolescence and Human Development

Adolescence is the developmental period situated between childhood and adulthood. It is biologically marked by sexual development of the reproductive organs and the secondary sexual characteristics associated with each sex. However, the period is far more complex, and is also a crucial period for cognitive (Piaget, 1972), moral (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1969) and, psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963). Adolescence is important to the long term success of humans as it prepares individuals for the transition to adulthood.

Erikson (1963) identified the developmental stage of adolescence as being important to the development of identity and avoiding the crisis of identity confusion. This period is important for developing a sense of who one is and the beliefs one has. During this time, adolescents explore roles and functions of those roles in situations and

through different experiences. Experimentation is the word often used during this period (Caldwell & Darling, 1999). For many adolescents, experimenting with roles and behaviors is healthy, as it allows youth to explore identity roles and make decisions that inform their self-concept. At times, experimentation can also lead to involvement in negative behaviors and association with delinquent peers. However, negative effects associated with experimentation are often tied to the availability of microsystem influences (e.g., peers, parents and significant others) that support or disapprove of deviant behaviors. More likely to occur is *foreclosure*, which is defined as a failure to explore roles and associated behaviors during identity development (Marcia, 1980).

Foreclosure occurs when one prematurely settles on an identity. This means that individuals approach the period of identity development with little or no exploration of roles and the mores, ideas, and behaviors associated with these roles. Erikson believed that foreclosure led to identity crisis later in life, and that individuals experiencing foreclosure were stagnant in their development. While foreclosure is problematic, so is prolonged identity exploration or *diffusion* (Marcia, 1980).

Diffusion is problematic during identity development, because individuals fail to realize fulfilling experiences that could lead to settling on an identity. A state of diffusion can lead to long-term problems with intimacy and commitment to specific roles. Identity formation plays a great role in learning volition and independent action.

Individuation is a process that occurs simultaneously with identity development and key to the development of internal capacities like self-determination and initiative (Josselson, 1980; Larson, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Individuation is a task that reflects the individual and social processes related to identity development (Josselson, 1980). Individuation explains the move from family-based experiences to peer-based experiences. Adolescents are trying to establish autonomous and individual identities while receiving the support and feedback from a group of peers. Individuation is marked by four related phases: (1) differentiation, (2) practice and experimentation, (3) rapprochement, and (4) consolidation of self (Josselson, 1980).

The phase of differentiation is marked by the development of views and beliefs that are ascribed to the self. This phase marks the first steps that youth take in differentiating their view and opinions from parents. Next, youth begin practice and experimentation, where adolescents become overtly independent. Youth in this phase often openly disagree with parents and may also defy rules and expectations that parents set for them. Peer acceptance and bonding with peers becomes important during this phase as youth seek to feel socially connected to peers while becoming more disconnected from parents. During rapprochement, youth learn to reconcile with parents and accept of parental authority, while maintaining a level of autonomy not present before the start of the individuation process. Consolidation of self, the fourth phase, of individuation, is marked by an expressed sense of identity, while acknowledging and dependence on parents and family. At the conclusion of this process, youth realize they are distinct yet dependent from parents.

One of the major findings in identity research is the notion that identity exploration and its associated tasks are most often reported as behaviors in the later teen

and early years of the twenties (Arnett, 2000). During this period, young people are entering college and have more true freedom to explore roles and experiment with behaviors and ideas without parental oversight. Much of this has to do with the structure of industrialized countries and delayed entry into a professional work force, formal marital responsibilities, and long-term adult roles (Arnett, 2000; Rindfuss, 1991). While adolescence has never had a specified ending period, this extension beyond the teen years is well recognized in the literature and is formally known as *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2006).

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a term that is largely associated with industrialized countries where young people are permitted to have a prolonged period of independence without true independence and adult responsibilities (Arnett, 2000). It is distinct from adolescence and adulthood in that it offers freedoms not often available in the teen years without the associated expectations societies have for adults. The theoretical basis for emerging adulthood comes from findings of North American studies on identity achievement in the high school years (Montemayor, Brown, & Adams, 1985; Waterman, 1982). These studies find that identity achievement rarely occurs following high school, and it often extends into the late teen and early years of the twenties (Valde, 1996).

Emerging adulthood is a period where young people have great possibilities to explore romantic relationships, new roles, and new worldviews (Arnett, 2000). It is also a period where young people report remarkable levels of feeling in control of their lives or feelings of volition. As this stage of development marks the formal transition to

adulthood, the developmental processes that occur during this period have significant, long-term bearing on the lives of individuals. This perspective on development has particular relevance to colleges and universities, as these institutions often serve and assist with developing young people during this developmental period.

Theoretical Bases for the Study

This study is guided by theories of human development and outlines the intrapersonal, interpersonal and reciprocal influences on development. The bases for this study are found within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Bio-Ecological Model, Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, and Larson's concept of initiative. These three theories provide the mesotheory and theoretical lens from which to interpret data collected from interviews, observations, and reviews of artifacts associated with the college leadership council under exploration by this study.

The Bio-Ecological Model of Human Development

The Bio-Ecological Model provides the underlying mesotheory for understanding the theoretical orientation of the study. A mesotheory describes a process-oriented framework that provides direction to interpreting meaning or social realities within the study through data collection and analysis (Henderson, 2006). The developmental literature demonstrates that human development is a complex process that involves negotiating individual level changes while being influenced and acting within different environments. A theory that integrates the developing self within coexisting environmental contexts is the Bio-ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The Bio-ecological Model posits that human development is influenced

by the individual interacting within multiple environmental systems. These systems interact with individuals to mutually influence the system and the individual, and can promote or restrict the range of behaviors in which one engages. The Bio-Ecological Model does not explain behavior; rather it explains the nature of the relationship between the developing individual and the bio-ecological systems that influence that individual.

According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), human development is most significantly impacted through reciprocal interactions between the human organism and the microsystem, which is the most immediate external environment to that organism. These interactions are most effective when they occur regularly over extended periods of time, and are labeled proximal processes. Development occurs through transactions between person and environment, where the person is an active player within an environment that is responsive and similarly impacted by the person engaged. The bio-ecological model states that power, form, content, and direction of proximal processes vary depending on the joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; of the settings or social environments in which they interact; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the social continuities and changes that occur over an individual's life course and in the historical period in which that individual has lived. In each case, the person plays a direct and indirect role in how proximal processes are (or are not) set into motion and impact human development. It was with this orientation that Self-Determination Theory and the concept of initiative were applied in this study through analysis and interpretation—a theoretical lens. These

theories explain the proximal processes that occur within contexts, and provide some focus for understanding how these processes influence behavior over time.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is useful in understanding what motivates young people to participate and continue participation in leadership opportunities offered within college and university settings. SDT plays a major role in understanding the concept of initiative or learning to persist through challenge over time. Initiative is an outcome of intrinsic motivation--a positive human inclination to discover, study, and test our personal capabilities, competencies, and limitations. Intrinsic motivation is a natural propensity to delve into ourselves to discover what is personally needed to enjoy life to its fullness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is best depicted as action performed for the sake of pure joy associated with the action—the behavior is fulfillment in itself.

Ryan and Deci theorize that there is a natural, human inclination toward agency and self-determination, and that its antithesis—amotivation or people's weakness in the direction of inactivity or passivity—is brought about by denying basic needs for lifelong development. SDT outlines three basic needs for growth in their personal and social development and these are identified as: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These three basic needs of human development are capable of promoting positive growth and satisfaction when met, and provide a point of investigation when considering how the context of programs and structured experiences for young people assist in development (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The concept of intrinsic motivation is the natural inclination to look for something new, exciting and stimulating. It is action that comes from within, and is demonstrated when action is performed purely for its own merits, which distinguishes it from amotivation which is inaction or action without purpose. Extrinsic motivation is best exemplified by actions or behaviors that are carried out for reasons outside the behavior alone. Typically, these are explained as doing something to gain or avoid something, such as a reward or punishment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, extrinsically motivated behaviors or actions may come from within a person's greater sense of purpose or to avoid conflict and anxiety associated with some personally accepted norm or because action is related to one's identity and consistent with one's values. These latter examples of extrinsic motivation are referred to as forms of internal regulation, as behavior is performed for personally relevant reasons as opposed to gaining or avoiding something external to the behavior or action in question. Behaviors that are internally regulated are often similar in benefit to intrinsically motivated behaviors, as individuals learn to make activities personally relevant and meaningful.

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) is a sub-theory of SDT that outlines under which conditions that intrinsic motivation thrives. Intrinsic motivation arises in settings where opportunities for competence, which is feeling capable to handle a challenge, and autonomy, the sense of personal choice and decision making, are supported. The natural pull of an activity brings one to perform or act and this behavior is continued through the fulfillment of their need to feel capable and autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The process does not take place in simply achieving a goal or outcome as it encompasses the

sense of satisfaction and the interaction that takes place. Autonomy is critical to action, while competence provides feedback that maintains engagement. Competence cannot support intrinsic motivation without feelings of autonomy. Controlling and restrictive environments have been linked to lower levels of intrinsic motivation, interest, desire for challenge, curiosity, learning and creative thought processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Relatedness, the third basic need for health and well being, is thought to increase feelings of intrinsic motivation; however it is not necessary for intrinsic motivation.

Studies have shown that positive encouragement can increase intrinsic motivation; while negative feedback from others can undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Another sub-theory of SDT is the Organismic Integration Theory (OIT). OIT describes the process of internalization, which explains how extrinsic motivators become internalized and meaningful to the self (Ryan & Deci, 2000). OIT identifies a continuum of motivation and explains the root of each form of motivation. On one side of the continuum is amotivation where an individual lacks the desire or motive for action. Amotivation exists when one feels a lack of control and acting without purpose. It is the most developmentally disruptive state on the motivation continuum, and too many experiences with amotivation can be detrimental to long-term development. Following amotivation are four forms of extrinsic motivation. External regulation occurs when individuals act to avoid punishment or gain rewards. When one is externally regulated, that person is engaged purely for external reasons. The next three types of extrinsic motivators provide reasons for behavioral engagement that are rooted to the self or internalized regulators.

Internalization starts with introjected regulation, or regulation to avoid anxiety associated with personally accepted values or beliefs about a specific activity. For example, one might attend a function for work, because one feels that is an expectation he or she should honor. Identified regulation takes place when one identifies an action as being important to their perceived self. A young man that considers himself adventurous might try bungee jumping because he feels it is consistent with his identity or what he should do, as opposed to genuine interest in the activity. The form of internalized regulation most closely aligned with intrinsic motivation is termed integrated regulation, which occurs when the reasons to participate or take action is fully attributed to one's needs and personal values. Activities that support this highest level of extrinsic motivation can lead toward intrinsic motivation. Learning to internalize behavior is seen as important because it requires individuals to learn to find personal meaning in activities that may have been initiated for external reasons only. Many of the responsibilities of adulthood require individuals to internalize their motivations for certain behaviors, thus, the process of internalization is theorized to be an important task of development. Internalization mirrors the development of another important internal capacity, initiative, which is theorized to develop in freely chosen, structured, out-of-school time experiences.

The Concept of Initiative

The Psychosocial Theory of Development identifies skills or tasks that are encountered at different stages of human development, which influence the success of individuals' social and emotional development (Erikson, 1968). In the third of these six

stages (occurring from 3 to 6 years old), Erikson explains that every child is to learn initiative without guilt. Here initiative is seen as a positive response to challenges, taking responsibility, learning new skills and feeling purposeful. How a parent responds to their child's can lead to a child feeling a sense of purpose or inhibition. (Boeree, 2006) As a child grows into adolescence, initiative can continue to develop or become stagnant (Larson, 2000).

Larson (2000) made a professional and personal plea when he called for more research on the development of initiative. Larson discussed and appeared to support Benedict's (1938) assertion that youth in Western society are raised as dependent with little responsibilities given to them to allow for personal development of skills that they will need to function as contributing adults later in life. In past studies of adolescents, Larson observed that youth often felt bored or not motivated outside of school (Larson & Richards, 1991). This lack of motivation and prevalence of boredom raised concern about the future of youth and society if out-of-school time experiences could not engage youth and prepare them for adult roles (Larson, 2000). Other studies of structured experiences demonstrated high levels of engagement and intrinsic motivation, which led Larson to contend that these structured experiences outside of school allowed youth the time to negotiate challenges and maintain involvement because of the relational supports that existed within these intrinsically appealing environments. For these reasons, Larson strongly advocated that studies examine the development of initiative as a product of out-of-school time experiences and programs for youth.

Larson identifies initiative as the capacity to direct attention and efforts over time

toward a challenging goal. Initiative is viewed as a basis for other components of positive development such as creativity, leadership, altruism and civic engagement each needed to ensure a sustainable, vibrant society. The settings or environments in which these youth development components appear to thrive are through structured voluntary activities, such as sports, arts and participating in organizations (Larson, 2000; Larson, Wilson & Mortimer, 2002; Dworkin, Larson & Hansen, 2003).

Interrelated with initiative is the concept of agency or autonomous action (Bandura, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Larson, 2000). Held within a person, autonomous action exists when there is a reason or motivation to provide concentrated effort to reach a challenging goal. A central question is whether initiative is innate or developed over time. In a high school environment, adolescents are taught facts and skills and corrected when they make mistakes. In turn, college is a learning environment where adolescents are expected to take responsibility to assess and utilize what they have learned (Astin, 1993). Here, initiative is needed to successfully complete courses of study and prepare to take move towards a career.

Initiative is a quality that is highly regarded in the business world and throughout the U.S. and Western society. It is what makes a difference between the development and success of a business, organization or agency (Arnett, 1998; Larson, 2000; Larson 2002). In adulthood, job demands are higher, and adolescents must learn how to stay motivated and endure through challenges that are not intrinsically appealing. To achieve this, initiative must be developed in our future adults by providing opportunities for growth within course assignments, volunteering, leadership councils, student

government, extracurricular activities, community service projects, or part-time jobs (Larson, 2000).

Larson theorized that the contexts in which adolescents could experience initiative must involve three elements 1) intrinsic motivation, in that they want to participate in an endeavor and are vested in it 2) concerted engagement in an environment, where thought and effort are not random but directed, and 3) a temporal arc, in which efforts involve dealing with setbacks, re-evaluations and changing strategies over time. These contexts can emerge in the daily lives of youth and be developed through structured environments such as sports, the arts and youth organizations (Larson, 2000) such as the leadership council that is the subject of this study.

Environments That Support Self-Determination and Initiative

For the purposes of this project, an examination of settings or contexts which support Self-Determination Theory and the development of initiative are reviewed for this study of a college leadership group. Prior to Larson's introduction of the concept of initiative (2000), there was little research and theoretical application on outside school activities and the support that can be provided by adults in these environments (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). A great deal of the research literature focused on parenting and the role of school on developmental processes. For example, Grolnick, Deci and Ryan's summary of internalization processes was developed out of studies of motivation in the classroom and the role of parents and teachers in this process (Grolnick, Deci & Ryan, 1997; Watts, Cronan, & Caldwell, 2005; Watts & Caldwell,

2008). The summary of these studies identified three fundamental social-contextual components that supported the development of internalization. These elements are:

- 1) *Autonomy support* in which one can assist adolescents decisions in activities which can include promoting initiative, lessening the use of direction, and recognizing the viewpoints of others.
- 2) *Structure* or the development of guidelines for behavior by utilizing discussion of expectations, reasoning and consequences through feedback or evaluation.
- 3) *Interpersonal involvement* or the devotion of time and effort in a young person's activities by taking a genuine interest in their efforts and providing an encouraging environment for growth.

Hutchinson, Baldwin, and Caldwell (2003) extended this research as they studied parental practices to structure, regulate and support their teens' free-time while looking at the development or lack of autonomy. Though the study group was small, they were able to provide examples of how adults influence an adolescence development as they studied two parenting styles they referred to as demandingness or overtly controlling and responsiveness where parents provided warmth, acceptance and involvement. Adults, who retain control and fail to allow youth to make informed choices for themselves, can create amotivation or failure to develop self-regulation or internalization (Pelletier, et al 2002).

Promoting positive settings for adolescent development was the emphasis behind the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine's call for gathering research on

community based programs. Upon compiling this information they noted that to create a positive developmental setting, programs must include the important elements of physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms or rules of behavior, and the support of efficacy or mattering (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). These components appear to mirror the work of Grolnick and her colleagues as these program elements support basic needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy.

There is further support in the literature for specific practices in which professionals can engage. In dealing with adolescents, especially late adolescents, adults such as sponsors or advisors in youth organizations are most successful when they are able to maintain an appropriate balance of structure and relationship with youth to encourage their progress in achieving goal related projects and activities. These behaviors are performed while avoiding the temptation to take control away from youth and crush youths' sense of competence and autonomy (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005). Larson and his colleagues (2005) remind us that youth are still developing the capacities for self-regulating or structuring their efforts while taking into consideration the viewpoints of others when working in a team setting. Adults in these settings function to support the process of metacognition, or the ability to think about thinking, so that youth learn to question themselves and develop strategic thinking during a planning processes and performance associated with these types of structured activities. Youth are able to reach higher levels of development when they are helped by adults who are vested in youth, who youth trust, and who are able to achieve a balance in their direction and

support (Larson, Hansen & Walker, 2005; Catalano, et al, 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

The Role of Higher Education Programs

There are numerous benefits associated with college enrollment (Kuh, 1995). These benefits include, but are not limited to substantial gains in knowledge (particularly in the major), autonomy, social maturation, and personal competence; modest gains in verbal and quantitative skills, cognitive complexity, aestheticism, and awareness of interests, values, aspirations. It is also widely reported that attaining a college education is likely to lead to job satisfaction and higher pay. However, like many other social institutions, the work of colleges and universities in North America is becoming more intentional in nature and these institutions seek results that can make students viable, productive graduates that will represent their alma maters well.

According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2008), higher education institutions are playing a larger role in preparing college students to be engaged and contributing members of society. This model of education mirrors Irby, Pittman, and Tolman's (2003) goals for youth development; i.e., problem free, fully prepared and fully engaged adults, as a barometer for successful development. By extending these principles to the realm of higher education, policies implemented by universities and colleges acknowledge their role in developing emerging adults and preparing these individuals for adulthood. As service institutions, universities and colleges recognize that excellence in education is not measured by the number of graduates that complete their degrees but on the successes of those students after

graduation. The entire college experience is now designed to develop the whole person, and student services are focusing more on academic and social integration with the intent of helping students become persistent, resilient individuals who go onto success following graduation (Tinto, 1997).

Numerous studies have been conducted to understand what processes lead to graduation, and success beyond that important milestone (Kuh, et al. 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). According to Astin (1999) student involvement plays a large role in the success of college students. Student involvement refers to a set of behaviors related to the educational experience, and is reflected in the time that students spend studying for classes, being on campus, participating in student organizations and clubs, and interacting with fellow students and faculty members (Astin, 1999). Studies of student retention demonstrate that student involvement played a major role in preventing dropout. Specifically, living on campus and involvement in student organizations, clubs, intercollegiate athletics, and faculty interaction through research projects proved to be critical factors related to student retention. However, Astin also makes clear that the nature of this involvement matters as much as the amount of time spent on campus, in activities and interacting with peers and faculty. He suggests that future studies seek to understand if high quality programs compensate for the lack of quantity and to what extent involvement is related to developmental outcomes for students. Studies related to persistence provide some guidance when exploring these questions (Tinto, 1998).

Persistence reflects the process of continuing studies and making progress toward a degree (Leppel, 2002). Persistence leads to graduation, and reflects a process of support and involvement that occurs during the college experiences. This process of support and involvement is widely referred to as academic and social integration (Berris & Smith, 1991; Tinto, 1997). Academic and social integration reflect Astin's (1999) definition of student involvement. According to Leppel (2002), integration occurs when student experiences connect the student socially and intellectually into the life of the institution. Attinasi (1989) asserts that integration provides valuable experiences for personal development. These experiences assist students in learning and developing specific strategies for "negotiating the physical, social, and cognitive/academic geographies" (p. 267). The college experience is facilitated through interactions with school, friends and faculty. These relationships help to connect students to the university, and help them persist through to graduation. These ideas are very closely related to Ryan and Deci's (2000) description of the internalization process in Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

Ryan and Deci theorize that relatedness often sparks internalization by linking individuals to esteemed others from which we adopt values, share mores, and to which we feel connected. Individuals experience greater levels of internalization when feelings of competence are supported and they identify with the performed behavior. Internalization reaches its highest state when individuals feel support for autonomy or they feel they have choices that emanate from personal goals or values. This process is reflected in the support of persistence as students learn to relate to others, develop

feelings of competence, and gradually make the choice to continue their studies. In further support of the link between SDT and persistence, Leppel (2002) explains that participation in school clubs and activities may be one way in which students develop a sense of achievement. Success experienced in these activities contributes to the enjoyment of the college experience. Several experiences with academic and social integration lead to an enhanced sense of utility and a higher probability of persistence through college. In this case, a sense of achievement is aligned with the idea of competence found in SDT. In addition to experiencing the basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, persistence is also reflective of several experiences to practice initiative.

Initiative involves directing energy toward a goal over time (Larson, 2000; Watts & Caldwell, 2008). The experiences emanating from academic and social integration support students as they experience the many challenges presented in college life. In many ways, persistence through the college years represents a large demonstration of initiative on the part of college students. However, persistence through these years is supported by integration and multiple forms of academic and social involvement. This model of initiative is consistent with how this concept is typically depicted (Larson, 2000; Larson, Hansen, & Dworkin, 2005; Watts, Cronan, & Caldwell, 2005). In addition to being contexts to support the internalization process and develop initiative, involvement with student clubs, organizations and activities are related to experiences with achievement, social negotiation and leadership. These are all important outcomes that are consistent with the developmental period of emerging adulthood.

The goal of many higher education activities and programs for students is to promote leadership (Crest, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). The study of leadership in higher education institutions is growing, and is consistently focused on the outcomes associated with these programs (Astin, 1999). For example, Crest et al. (2001) found that participants in leadership programs from ten different universities experienced growth in civic responsibility, leadership skills, multi-cultural awareness, and pro-social awareness behaviors. This study supported earlier work by Astin and Sax (1998) who found modest gains in similar skills and behaviors. It extended this earlier work by demonstrating changes in leadership behavior and knowledge of leadership practices even when controlling for personality dispositions that typically sought out leadership experiences. The study identified opportunities for service, experiential activities, and active learning through collaboration as key elements for creating change in intended outcomes (Crest et al., 2001).

Research in Higher Education on persistence demonstrates that changes in students' social and personal competence are related to more than just involvement with extracurricular activities. Some changes in these outcomes are attributed to deep learning activities found in students' coursework, particularly those classes within majors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students scoring high on measures of social and personal development also had higher faculty expectations, wrote multiple drafts of academic papers, and participated in community-based projects as part of the coursework (Reason, Terenzini & Domingo, 2007).

Chickering and Gamson (1987) introduced the “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” which included student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning (Kuh, et al, 2005). These results are promising for higher education institutions as they seek to develop programs to prepare students for the working world and, ultimately, adulthood. However, much work in this area needs to occur. Where past studies have focused on traditional education goals, new studies need to focus on how colleges and universities prepare students for success after school (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). Studies in human development, especially those focusing on youth development, rarely examine how higher education programs support the development of internal capacities such as initiative and self-determination. Studies with this focus have the potential to inform practice and make a large contribution to what is known about higher education programs and services designed to impact life skills and human development. In an effort to address this need, this study sought to explore the processes that occur within a university leadership group specifically focused on developing life skills and impacting youth transitioning to adulthood. Results from this study will provide perspective on how these programs work most effectively, and also report on the challenges facing these programs.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the developmental supports for self-determination and initiative present in a student leadership program. The program under investigation brings together students and prepares them for leadership roles in their home department and to the broader university student body population. Utilizing qualitative research methods, information was gathered through in-depth interviews with members, and observation of meetings, planned events and other student council activities. Data were collected to address the following research questions: 1) Why do leadership council members join and continue with the leadership council?; 2) How does the context of a leadership council support autonomy, competence and interpersonal relatedness?; and 3) What experiences within the leadership council detract from self-determination and initiative?

Information gathered from this study may benefit those in the youth development field, especially higher education institutions charged with preparing emerging adults for life after college. Sections of this methods chapter include a description of research context, the case study method, selection and description of participants, data collection methods, procedures for data analysis, and procedures for ensuring trustworthiness.

Research Context

The student organization under study was a leadership program. In 2007-08 it had 11 undergraduate members and two advisors: a tenured professor and graduate student. The leadership program was inspired by a university leadership initiative to

create opportunities for students within all colleges and departments to develop leadership skills. The program was originally conceived in spring 2003. Beyond complying with the university initiative, the program was attractive to the host department because it represented a viable avenue for increasing student leadership within the department and connecting students with the program. The program was supported by the host department, because it represented another way to increase awareness about the department and its course offerings.

The program formally began during the fall semester of 2003. At that time, eight students were selected by a faculty advisor and graduate advisor based on written applications. After selection, the students and advisors met to complete the organizational constitution and by-laws. Attendance by members during this first year was considered excellent with 6-8 members present for each weekly meeting. In addition to creating the operating foundation for the group, members also began to make plans for service activities that included leading teams for community clean-up, the creation of a faculty dinner series, and acting as hosts and hostesses for the annual departmental banquet. While these activities went well, the faculty dinner series emerged as a legacy for the leadership group. The faculty dinner series started with a few faculty members hosting council members for informal dinners in their homes. These dinners provided students an opportunity to interact with faculty and were highly valued by the students who attended. Overall, the year was considered a success.

Year two (2004-05) presented many challenges. It started off with returning members and the faculty advisor, Dr. Hudson, conducting the interviews for new

potential members. This process enabled leadership to emerge from within the group and set the stage for only student group members being involved in the selection process in subsequent years. Soon after the beginning of the fall semester, the shared leadership started to show some weaknesses with members not following through with ideas to implement during the school year. Even though there were seven members of the leadership group, only 2 to 3 members were attending meetings or even indicated an interest in continuing the organization. The active members moved forward with the planning of the faculty dinner series and other activities utilizing their limited resources. These projects were completed and other members did participate, however their lack of support in the planning stages proved very frustrating for those members who were committed to the organization's success. To those outside the organization, the year was successful but to the active members, there was much work to be done to avoid a similar situation in the coming year.

During the spring semester, the three remaining members began planning for the group's third year (2005-06). They created a Co-Chair or Co-Coordinator and Executives model, where two senior members would make sure that all executives and all members were fulfilling their organizational responsibilities. Job descriptions, expectations for individual members, and a code of expected performance for the group were drafted and implemented. Constitutional amendments were also drafted and approved.

Year three (2005-06) became a rebuilding year. New members had a clearer understanding of the expectations and duties of all council members. The selection

interviews were conducted by the two senior members remaining from year one. These individuals developed screener questions to target new members and identify roles for incoming members. At the first full meeting of the year each new member was provided with a list of expectations, a draft of job descriptions and responsibilities associated with membership in the council, and constitutional amendments that were subsequently voted for and accepted by all members. Early in the fall term, a new graduate student advisor was designated by Dr. Hudson with the primary role of providing guidance to the leadership development process. The members also decided to focus the program's activities in four areas, 1) service to the department, 2) university, and 3) community and 4) development of student group members.

The beginning of the year was challenging, as the group leadership worked to keep members moving forward on projects, while avoiding repeating some of the mistakes that led to the previous year's problems. In one instance, the students in leadership positions moved to impose a review of one member for neglecting to follow through with mandated progress reports. The review caused tensions to rise within the group. In this case, the group advisor facilitated a discussion during a weekly meeting to help the group understand group processes and functioning—emphasizing the responsibilities that each member had to the others in the group. This proved helpful, as the group worked through their differences and eventually began to work as a unit towards their goals. The faculty dinner series grew to accommodate and was expanded to all undergraduate students in the department, and the leadership program continued to host the department's annual banquet. The group also served as the hosts for the

department's open house and developed an informational night for the university's general studies program to recruit students into the department. During the department's Diversity Lecture Series members helped in organizing and serving a soul food dinner as a part of African-American History Month. The group president also served as the department's student representative to the college's student advisory council. Thus, the work undertaken by the returning members before the start of the academic year provided a strong foundation for a very successful year.

For year four (2006-07) the success of the leadership program continued with the group's president returning for her senior year. This was the president's fourth year in the group, and she returned with a strong vision of how the organization would operate. Again, all new members were provided with strong indications of the expectations associated with membership in the group. They were assigned to executive positions by the student officers based on previous experience, skills and desires. The group began the year with ten members and finished with seven, as two dropped out of the group and one graduated. The faculty dinner series added a new component in the spring with professionals from different companies dining with undergraduates to discuss career paths. The department open house had great faculty participation, and the group continued its role of host at the annual spring banquet. New to this year was a beginning of the year rib cook-off featuring competition between students, faculty and staff. Another new activity for the group was the Mr. & Miss Department pageant and talent show. The talent show proved to be a successful night that brought students from all majors involved in the host academic department. The leadership group also revamped

the department's career fair bringing potential employers to meet with undergraduate and graduate students. The cohesiveness and accomplishments of the group led to being named the outstanding student organization by a major national organization. The former graduate student advisor also received national recognition for his work with the group.

This study started following the fourth year of the student group, and interviewed members of that fourth year council as they departed at the end of the 2006-07 academic year. The study continued into the 2007-08 academic year and concluded in March 2008.

The Case Study Method

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to address its research questions. Qualitative methodology offers the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge about the empirical social world in question. Qualitative methods allow researchers to get close to data, and derive an analytical and conceptual understanding from the data itself (Creswell, 2007). Creswell explains that qualitative methods allow for the integration of multiple forms of data from which phenomena can be investigated through inductive approaches that allow findings to emerge and not be prefigured.

According to Yin (1994), the purpose of a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates real-life phenomenon. Case studies are especially useful in research contexts where complex social phenomena exist. The qualitative approach chosen is explanatory in nature, as the study of this particular phenomenon used a theoretical lens guided by Self-Determination Theory and the concept of initiative, and therefore follows an identification of patterns and plausible relationships that are theorized to happen within

the phenomenon. In this case study, the phenomenon is related to how college students become involved and maintain involvement in a student leadership group (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Case studies are meant to explain the causal links of real life by employing multiple sources of data in from a particular setting over a particular place and time (Henderson, 2006). Henderson explains that case studies are often used to gather information on groups, and that these groups may include communities, organizations, or institutions. Data are derived from observations, in-depth interviews, surveys, and other documents or artifacts to form the case (Creswell, 2007; Henderson, 2006; Yin, 1994). According to Yin, the utility of the case study approach is that it examines patterns of behavior over time in an effort to explain the complexities of these patterns and their relationships with phenomena under investigation.

In this case study approach, the researcher examined specific supports for self-determined behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). That is, the researcher sought to understand what supports for the basic needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy existed within group processes, and also from where these supports emerged. To do this, this study examined the roles of student leadership group members, group members charged with specific leadership roles, and faculty and graduate student advisors in influencing processes to facilitate or forestall support of these basic needs. The researcher approached the study with the perspective that supports for the basic needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence impact students' motivation for involvement in the group, and in turn, impact how group members work through challenges and difficult

experiences that often occur within groups working toward common goals. It should be noted, however, that while an explanatory approach utilizes a theoretical lens to help guide the investigation of phenomena, the purpose of using a qualitative approach is to allow for both converging and diverging ideas. The argument for performing a qualitative study in this case is that involves participants and a setting that is not typically investigated using this theoretical orientation. In this study, a theoretical lens is meant to provide a conceptual focus, while allowing personal theories to emerge from data collected to form the case (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Selection and Description of Participants

Members of the leadership council were selected for this study due to the proximity of meetings and planned events for observation purposes, the availability of organizational records, as well as the current members' willingness to be observed and to participate in interviews. As the leadership council limited their membership to no more than 12 students, this allowed for in-depth study and analysis within the time period allotted for this study. Each member of the student council was over 18 years of age and was contacted directly by phone or email to set up an initial appointment during which consent forms for interviews and observations for the study were completed. The students were given the option of not participating; however all students and advisors signed consent forms and agreed to the study.

Description of Study Participants

All the members of the student leadership group were students between their sophomore and senior year of college. They ranged between 19 and 22 years of age. For

the purposes of confidentiality, the study assigned pseudonyms to participants. Diane, Gage and Micah started as freshmen in the department, all others transferred into the department their sophomore year. All organizational members must be full time (12 credit hours) students in good standing and maintaining a minimum 2.5 grade average. The students were selected by returning member interviews.

Diane became a founding member of the student leadership group in fall 2003 as a freshman, she became the Co-Chair for the 2005-06 school term and President the following year. She graduated in May 2007. Other than serving on a high school advisory committee, she had no experience with a leadership program before joining the group under study.

Shelley transferred into the university from another institution and became involved with the major academic department for this leadership group (hereafter, the major) as a sophomore. She joined in fall 2004 and served as Co-Chair in 2005-06 with Diane. She brought a lot of experience working with other organizations prior to joining the leadership group.

Ben transferred into major as a sophomore and joined the leadership group in the fall of 2005 as a junior. He served as Vice President and Treasurer the second year of his membership. He graduated in spring 2007. Ben came from a very small community with a graduating high school class of 32 and was involved in several school organizations.

Ann joined the leadership group in 2005-06 for her senior year in the major; she was encouraged to join by her mom after the department's spring banquet. She served as the fund raising executive. She was involved in other campus organizations, even serving as chair for one and she had much leadership experience in her high school.

Patricia was with the leadership group for one year and served as the organizations Department Development Executive. This position was charged with working to promote greater undergraduate and faculty interrelations. She transferred into the university from a local junior college where she served as the President of the Republican Club in which she was the only female member.

Gabby was a member of the leadership group during her senior year and served with Rene to lead the first Career Fair hosted by the organization. She was highly involved in other campus organizations prior to joining this group.

Rene graduated this past spring 2008 after completing an internship off campus. She worked with 1st year members Daniel and Micah to prepare them to implement the department's Career Fair for all undergraduate and graduate students to attend. She worked on this project with Gabby in spring 2007 during her first year with the leadership group. Like Ben, she was also from a very small high school where she was very active in student leadership programs.

Anita was a junior when she became a member of the leadership group in 2006-07 serving as the Dinner Series Executive and the President in her senior year 2007-08. She is scheduled to graduate in fall 2008. She participated in a university wide leadership program prior to joining the group under study and remains active in other campus organizations.

Sandy also started her junior year 2006-07 serving as the Recruitment Executive with the University's Academic Awareness day as her main project. In 2007-08 she continued to partner with this project and served as the Vice President. She graduated in May 2008 and will begin graduate studies in the fall.

Marie was the final returning member for the 2007-08 year, serving her first year with the leadership group in 2006-07. She served in as the Public Relations Executive, as well as, secretary this year. She also served as an executive officer in two other organizations on campus. She is set to graduate in Fall 08.

Gage was a first year member who graduated this Spring. He worked for two part time positions on campus and was a member of another informal campus organization. He worked with Sandy to prepare for and host the Academic Awareness day at the department.

Daniel was a first year member and worked with Micah and Rene to prepare for the Career Fair. He worked part time as a recruiter to a major employer and has traveled extensively. He will be returning to China this coming year and will most likely not continue with the leadership group in his senior year.

Micah was a first year member who worked on the Career Fair; he is a sophomore and was elected the President of the leadership group for the 2008-09 year. He worked as a bus driver for the university's transportation system and was very active in a major campus mentoring program.

Darcie, another first year member worked with Marie in Public Relations, she was expected to take this position fully in the spring 2009 term. She was a high school cheerleader and a member of student council in her high school.

Hellen was a first year member who worked as the Dinner Series executive. She was elected to serve as the Vice-President in 2008-09. She was active in leadership programs in high school and college.

Sidney served as the Treasurer and Fund Raising executive in her first year (2007-08) with the leadership group and will repeat in those positions next year. She saw this organization as the first real leadership opportunity that she has experienced. She did, however, play high school basketball and participated in an Upward Bound program which took her to Costa Rica. In the spring she joined two other campus organizations and began a part time job.

Cari started her first year with the leadership group as the executive for Departmental Development in 2007 and will add the responsibilities of Secretary in 2008-09. She worked as a dorm advisor and is part of a campus wide mentoring program. She was also active in other campus organizations during past years.

All university recognized student organizations are required to have faculty/staff advisors, they include:

Dr. Hudson was a tenured professor and heads the youth development portion of the recreation component of recreation portion of this department. He worked with the department head in developing the internal leadership program.

George began serving as the graduate student advisor during the third year of the leadership program. As an older student he brought a great deal of organizational leadership experience and training to the program. He remained a touch point despite a change in this position in fall 2007.

Steven was a PhD candidate and began serving as the graduate student advisor of the leadership group in December 2007. He has worked in the development of other leadership and youth programs.

Data Collection Methods

This case study featured three phases. The first phase used in-depth interviews with past key members and officers of student council, and all of the members who participated in the 2006-2007 academic year. The interviews were conducted by the researcher, recorded through the use of a digital voice recorder and notes taken during

the interviews. The purpose for these interviews was to gain greater insight into the individual members' perspectives and personal experiences (Patton, 2002). The questionnaire or interview guide for these interviews was approved by the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board and can be found in Appendix A. Questions selected for interviews were developed to gain assessment and perspective from group members about recruitment, selection, and participation in the student council. Questions also attempted to ascertain the program characteristics that influence continued involvement, and if these program characteristics promoted internalization and initiative among the student council members.

During the second phase of the study, information gathering and informal interviews took place during the 2007 summer break to gain a historical perspective of the student leadership group. In addition to documenting the program history, these data were used to formulate interview questions and guidelines for interviews conducted in fall 2007 and spring 2008. Sample interviews indicated that the questions were understood by current members with very little need for follow-up questions. The interviews took approximately 45-60 minutes to complete.

In-depth interviews focused on the experiences of members while active in the leadership group. These interviews occurred during the spring semester of 2007 with graduating and returning leadership group members. Interviews continued into the beginning of the fall 2007 term with four returning members who were officers for the 2007-08 academic year, and seven first year members during the spring 2008 term. After each interview was completed, the interviewer informed participants of the study

timeline and need to conduct follow-up interviews and member checks to clarify issues and confirm findings from previous interviews. Recordings were reviewed and stored, and interviewer's notes were kept to expand and provide context to interviews.

Beyond information related to the research questions, demographic information such as gender, age, race, academic year, and position held in the student council were gathered. Other information was recorded if it was offered in the open-ended question format (Patton, 2002). Other information included the students' hometown, parents' education and occupation, sibling(s) educational levels, and any previous experience in youth leadership programs or other extracurricular activities. Advisors and other graduating members were also interviewed to gather information about their historical perspectives and their viewpoint with regard to the current year's members, activities, interactions, successes, failures and awards. All participant perspectives were utilized to gain insight into the environment created throughout the student council experience and processes influencing those experiences.

Procedures for Data Analysis

From transcriptions of these interviews, the researcher analyzed data to look for common language used, perspectives gained and how these members defined success as individuals and for the group (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). Data were coded to reflect themes from this common language and these themes were developed using Self-Determination Theory and the concept of initiative as a theoretical lenses. Process analysis took place when reviewing information about the application, recruitment and selection process that occur in the spring term for the leadership group (Patton, 2002).

Data used in process analysis examined how the environment was supportive of internalized motivation and initiative, and also examined the roles that members and advisors had in providing these supports. While a theoretical lens was used, open coding was performed to account for possibilities outside of theory with the idea that theory could be supplemented or revised to account for new possibilities (Henderson, 2006). Documents containing history and pertinent data, including constitutions, minutes, meeting agendas, project planners, etc. related to the council's evolution were also gathered and reviewed to understand if past influences, changes in policies, procedures and general functioning of the student council affected current processes during the observed period.

Transcriptions were examined utilizing an open coding method to find the areas of commonality in experiences, characteristics, and skills the members of the student leadership council reported possessing or wanted to develop while striving for a successful outcomes related to the year's activities. Instances related to the phenomena of self-determination and initiative were noted during interviews, and were keyed during transcription and analysis. Special notice was placed on the previous experience in voluntary activities, leadership positions or contexts that help to support or hinder development of skills associated with leadership, such as self-determination and initiative. This took place to determine if skills for members were developed previously or during their experience with the student leadership group. Emphasis was also placed on identifying if volunteering for the positions, responsibilities, or special events while

in the student leadership council were extrinsic or intrinsic in nature, and how they were regulated as informed by organismic integration theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

During the axial coding stage, other components or sub-categories that were noted during this process focused on the opportunities created for the development of competence, relatedness and autonomy in the student leadership council's activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In examining the development of initiative, the researcher looked for opportunities during the year that involved a personal investment where concerted engagement in student council activities took place over significant periods of time during the academic year (Larson, 2000).

Observations of the student leaders occurred at meetings and during other important exchanges between council members, officers and division executives, and their advisors during the planning and implementation of year's events and projects. Digital recordings of meetings took place to complement notes taken during observations. Observations of interaction between members and advisors that supported or hindered the development of initiative and self-determination were used to triangulate findings from in-depth interviews (Henderson, 2006). An analysis of issues, which occur during meetings, in a leadership development process took place during observations, and recorded how components such as conflict management, negotiation, creativity and communications take place among the members and officers (Patton, 2002).

Observation of meetings were coded using process coding in which notations were made to document action/inaction during the time involved from the planning to implementation and evaluation of student council activities that took place during the

academic school year (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Using this, process changes that took place in the environment and context of the 2007-08 academic year were noted and compared to historical information available for the completion of other projects and events.

A constant comparison process was used to analyze the data collected and transcribed from interviews and observations to seek recurrent themes among the council members, the officers and their advisors during the course of the organization's 2006-07 and 2007-08 school terms. The elements of these reoccurring themes provided avenues for comparing or contrasting concepts and data in current research and literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Henderson, 2006).

Procedures for Ensuring Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is the idea that data have been validated through the processes of data discovery, display, interpretation and reporting (Henderson, 2006). Trustworthiness uses strategies to prevent unknown biases from entering into research—that what is observed and interpreted has been challenged and checked, and that alternative explanations have been explored. Just as quantitative studies work to establish internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, qualitative research aspires to the standards to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A description of each and how this study adheres to these standards follows.

Credibility

When establishing credibility one is concerned with understanding how truthful the particular findings of a study are (Decrop, 1999). Often times, qualitative research is questioned because the methods appear to lend themselves to subjectivity (Henderson, 2006). However, sound qualitative research guards against subjective interpretation through several methods. Henderson recommends that qualitative researchers should use guiding research questions or hypotheses to provide direction to a study. Guiding research questions and hypotheses focus the study, and also serve as a basis from which ideas can be observed for convergence and divergence through triangulation.

Triangulation means examining working research questions and hypotheses from more than one source of data (Denzin, 1978). Using multiple sources allows ideas to be supported, expounded upon, and provides accountability for new ideas; enhancing a study's generalizability (Decrop, 1999). Denzin outlined four types of triangulation:

- (1) Data triangulation – the use different data sources in a study
- (2) Investigator triangulation – the use of different researchers or evaluators
- (3) Theory triangulation – the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a set of data
- (4) Methodological triangulation – the use of multiple methods to study a single phenomenon or focus of study

Patton (1990) warns against relying on one form of triangulation, as these approaches are limited and lead to errors that weaken a study's credibility. Multiple forms of triangulation increase a researcher's ability to explain how conclusions were reached by

clearly linking information and demonstrating multiple instances that corroborate findings from a study.

The current study relies on data, investigator, and methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility of findings from this study. To support the review of data, this study used multiple data sources from several methods. This included data from in-depth interviews, reviews of minutes and e-mail interactions, and notes from observations of group meetings. Data were collected from in-depth interviews with past and current members of the leadership group. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the faculty and graduate student advisors. Group meetings were observed and researcher's notes were used from these observations. Meeting minutes, e-mail exchanges and reviews of documents specific to the group, artifacts of the case under observation were reviewed to further understanding through convergence and divergence. While the study used several sources of data, it also relied on an extended period of data collection.

Henderson (2006) points out that the use of extended observation periods and contacts with study participants enhances the credibility of the study. Overall, it is not enough to have multiple forms of data. A case under study requires that data come from prolonged engagement in a study (Henderson, 2006; Yin, 1994). Prolonged engagement plays an important role in increasing a study's credibility by providing that instances of data collection are not an artifact of a particular point of time or typical to one particular group or another. Rather, data from other sources allows the breadth and depth needed to promote credibility in studies, as descriptions tend to be thick and consistent over time (Henderson, 2006). This study was compatible with this latter approach as data

collection began during the fall of 2006 and followed cohorts through spring 2008. This period of time not only allowed the time to collect the data needed to inform the study, but it also occurred over a significant historical period to the genesis of this leadership group. In addition to methodological and data triangulation this study also used varying forms of investigator triangulation.

Investigator triangulation describes the process about which several investigators are used to interpret some or all of the data available in a study (Denzin, 1978). Under this criterion, this study relied on the interpretation of this researcher, and I was supported in my interpretation by separate coding and interpretation of my thesis committee chair, Dr. Clifton Watts. From the start of the coding process, Dr. Watts separately coded interviews and compared his interpretations with my interpretations in an effort to confirm or invalidate my ideas as they were forming in the research process. These checks were frequent at the beginning of this process, and decreased in frequency as the study progressed. Another type of investigator triangulation was the use of member checks. Member checks allowed research participants to become “co-researchers” (p. 189, Henderson, 2006). This process required this researcher to return back to participants to verify or challenge interpretations of ideas and themes developed through the coding process. Member checks happened early within interviews and continued toward the end of the research process as final interviews with key informants (i.e., student leaders and advisors to the leadership group) were used to verify and challenge the ideas found within subsequent drafts of this study’s research findings. This process allowed members to share their voice in this process and to account for insight

that went beyond this researcher's understanding of the case, and provided a method to see beyond the biases that this researcher may have introduced to this process (Henderson, 2006).

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability most resembles the notion of external validity in quantitative research (Henderson, 2006). While the idea of generalizing beyond a sample may not be appropriate because of issues related to how data are collected, generalizing to theory and how findings related to theory can be transferred to other settings is an important aspect of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Henderson, 2006). Henderson specifies that, "...if a qualitative study does not result in some type of theory analysis, transferability is quite unlikely" (p. 190). It is with this intent that data were analyzed.

Throughout the coding process, the study's major research questions served to guide the study, while the study also challenged the theoretical notions associated with Self-Determination Theory and the concept of initiative. Much of the research involving the theoretical bases for this study is focused specifically on adolescent activity and not activity specific to emerging adults. As I moved through the data analysis phased, I tried to account for what was consistent with my theoretical lens, and also for what this lens did not explain. It is with this approach that I hoped to explain the developmental functions leadership groups of this type serve, and add to what is known about these types of programs and how they can be improved to effectively serve the populations that they intend to influence.

Dependability

Dependability accounts for the study's reliability of analysis and interpretation (Henderson, 2006). Dependability in qualitative research refers to the quality of the research being conducted and relies heavily on a thick description of the methods used to formulate the research and how these methods are responsive and sensitive to the research at hand (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Additionally, methods used to enhance a study's credibility can similarly function to assure a study's dependability (Henderson, 2006). To this end, it is recommended that researchers keep a good audit trail for outside review and available to those performing independent coding of materials.

This study kept extensive records of research interviews, interview guides, notes and coding related to those interviews, and these were independently reviewed by this researcher's study chair, Dr. Clifton Watts. These steps were taken to assure that a level of consistency was observed while collecting, coding and interpreting data from interviews and observations. Furthermore, these procedures were reviewed and approved by this researcher's thesis committee with subsequent reviews of findings and methods completed within this researcher's final committee meeting.

Confirmability

Confirmability speaks to the degree to which the study is objective (Henderson, 2006). Often times, qualitative methods are criticized for being subjective as they rely on the researcher as the instrument for analysis and interpretation. However, as Patton (1990) observes, "quantitative methods are not more synonymous with objectivity than qualitative methods are synonymous with subjectivity..." (p.55). Patton contends that

the investigator needs to adhere to the complexity of research by valuing multiple perspectives as they come forth in data analysis and to report evidence that confirms and is at odds with emerging hypotheses and ideas reported in research. To this end, rival hypotheses need to be reported and explained as part of the qualitative research process (Henderson, 2006).

In keeping with this standard, this study focused on understanding the degree to which Self-Determination Theory and the concept of initiative explained how members of the leadership group became engaged with and maintained membership in this group. Ideas behind this theoretical lens provided guidance for interpreting data collected in this study, but exceptions and nuances to these ideas were reported to maintain the standard of confirmability. As ideas diverged from the study's theoretical lens, alternative explanations were developed and confirmed through member checking and reviewing alternative literature. Lastly, this study attempted to identify points where theory was lacking or new information emerged that could specifically guide practice with emerging adults in college settings.

Researcher Identity

A final piece in assuring trustworthiness is the process of sharing specific biases associated with the researcher's background and identity. Part of providing thick description in qualitative research is acknowledging one's own biases and experiences, as these might influence the tasks associated with coding, analysis, and interpretation (Henderson, 2006). Providing this information brings to light this researcher's interest in

pursuing this study and also draws attention to beliefs, ideas and life experiences that could possibly influence how decisions are made from this research.

As a grant writer working with community-based human service agencies, I have a long history of conducting interviews and focus groups in information gathering sessions in research, policy, and legal settings. To some extent, my previous work experience has prepared me well for undertaking this study, and I feel fairly competent in utilizing qualitative methods to investigate the case under study. That stated I am utilizing my major professor as a sounding board, independent investigator and corroborator for this research to strengthen how data are collected, analyzed and interpreted. My past experience as an administrator and leader of others through employment and volunteer work plays a large role in how I have experienced life; having my major professor listen to my ideas, review my coding procedures, and serve as a sounding board has made the best of my current and past life experiences.

I have several life experiences that serve as a basis for understanding leadership and group dynamic processes. These experiences started at the age of twelve in very limited instances, and while young, I was still considered a “late bloomer”. I first came to this realization at the age of 30 with the completion of a leadership program. I began to examine those interactions with adults that led to specific instances of growth, and set the stage for how I experienced life and the significant roles that other adults played in this process. From a very early age, I was supported by my mother, my priest, and adult leaders affiliated with the youth leadership program I joined as a twelve year old.

My adult role models became important to me and helped me lay out a future career oriented to helping others as a probation officer, alcohol & drug abuse counselor, and youth development specialist with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). During my time with BGCA, I served as the advisor for our Keystone Club which won national recognition for its community work in its second year of existence. It was through this experience as an adult youth leader that I came to understand the importance of advisors to young people. In fact, my BGCA experience strongly influenced my choice of this study, as I became interested in student organizations and their role in shaping college students. Through inquiry and reading, I came to realize that there are many gaps in how these groups are studied, and realized that my interests and understanding of leadership and group processes might serve me well in such a study. I focused on motivation and initiative because these two ideas reflect the importance of goals and the structures that help support youth to reaching goals. Pursuing this literature has provided clarity on how I have persevered to return and pursue my master's degree, the first degree of this type in my family, despite the many of obstacles of life I face as a returning adult learner.

I believe strongly in the importance of adults providing support to and modeling positive behavior for our young people, especially for those that are away from, or have few experiences with positive influences. I have seen a need to identify quality programs for supporting the development in young people, and replicating those programs with the needs of specific populations in mind. I embraced this project as a possibility to seek out those best practices with the idea that these practices can be replicated on college and

high school campuses to promote the positive development of young adults everywhere.

It is with these acknowledged experiences and biases that I pursued this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The intent of this study was to understand why students became members of a student leadership group, how this group supported their continued involvement and what elements detracted from this experience. Using a qualitative case study approach and using a theoretical lens that incorporated Self-Determination Theory and the concept of initiative, the study sought to address the following research questions: 1) Why do leadership council members join and continue with the leadership council?; 2) How does the context of a leadership council support autonomy, competence and interpersonal relatedness?; and 3) What experiences within the leadership council detract from self-determination and initiative?

This section summarizes the findings from the interviews, observations and review of policies and artifacts associated with the student leadership program under investigation. For ease of reading, each research question is presented with a summary of the descriptive information and themes used to inform each question. Illustrative quotes are from students who participated in the leadership group in years three, four and five as both were interviewed during this process, distinctions between the years were noted to provide perspective and context to what occurred from year to year.

Research Question 1: Why Do Leadership Group Members Join and Continue with the Leadership Group?

The Selection Process

Important to understanding the nature of why members join and continue is how members are identified and enrolled. Through observations of the meeting, this entire process was recorded and transcribed, a narrative of that process follows and provides insight into how members were identified, what priorities were placed on recruiting members and how new members were integrated and accepted by returning members of the group.

The year five (2007-08) selection process for incoming members was determined by self-selection as a call for new members occurred during the first week of the semester. From the start of this year, returning members made it a priority to encourage applications from good potential candidates. As the number of males participating in 2006-07 dwindled to one in the spring term, the group determined the need to seek out potential male students to maintain a gender balance within the group. Interested students were given a one week deadline from the date of the membership call to submit an application with resume, and register for an interview time to be held the following day. Applications were reviewed during the following week's meeting and interview questions were developed and used with a short list of candidates for the leadership group. Following candidate interviews, returning members met later that night to vote on new members.

The first meeting following the selection process focused on orienting new members to the different executive positions in the group. This entailed a reading of each executive's job duties, responsibilities, and major project. New members were told that they could access more information from a Yahoo Group website, and could also schedule a meeting with a returning member if further discussion was needed. After reading the job descriptions, new members were asked to submit their first and second choices for positions within the organization.

Responsibilities of all organizational officers and executive positions included:

- President is responsible for coordinating meetings and activities, along with the leadership group advisor and will be the primary contact person for the recognized student organization. The president is responsible to review project proposals, project progress reports, project evaluations and outlining general meeting agendas.
- The Vice-President is responsible for sending out emails and flyers. The Vice-President will update yahoo groups and contact lists. The Vice-President shall preside in the absence of the President, and assist with the President's official duties.
- The Secretary is to record minutes of each official meeting, as well as handle the correspondence between the organization, officers, and any established organization committees. The secretary will serve as historian for all documents, reports and agendas.
- The Treasurer shall handle financial activities, which include collecting and receiving all dues, fees, and other monies, and upon proper authorization, disperse them to meet obligations of the club. The Treasurer is to keep suitable financial records and accounts of all such monies. All funds collected will be deposited within 24 hours after collection in the Student Activities Financial Center.
- Executive of Fundraising – purpose of this position is to raise money for various causes while serving the community. The executive is responsible for implementing one fundraising project per semester.

- Executive of Recruitment – purpose of this position is to recruit incoming freshman along with current university students into the host department. The executive must plan and implement one recruitment project per semester. The executive is charged with implementing the student dinner series.
- Executive of Student Dinner Series – purpose of this position is to provide unique interaction between professionals and students in the field of study. The executive must work with faculty and professionals in the field to arrange a dinner series each semester.
- Executive of Departmental Development – the purpose of this position is to unify students in the host department providing educational guidance services for a successful college experience. The executive must plan and implement one project per semester.
- Executives of Professional Development – purpose is to create and build a relationship between the host department students, faculty and professionals in the field. The implementation of a spring semester career fair project is the main event for these executives.
- Executive of Public Relations – this position is charged to inform through multiple mediums, the host department and/or external groups of the student leadership group projects and activities.

Table 1: Executive Roles for the 2007-08 Academic Year

| MEMBER | OFFICE | CLASS | AGE | YEARS W/ REPS |
|--------|------------------------------|-----------|-----|--------------------|
| Anita | President | Junior | 21 | 2 nd Yr |
| Sandy | V-President / Recruitment | Senior | 21 | 2 nd Yr |
| Marie | Secretary / Public Relations | Senior | 21 | 2 nd Yr |
| Rene | Professional Development | Senior | 21 | 2 nd Yr |
| Sidney | Treasurer / Fund Raising | Junior | 20 | 1 st Yr |
| Gage | Recruitment | Senior | 21 | 1 st Yr |
| Daniel | Professional Development | Junior | 21 | 1 st Yr |
| Micah | Professional Development | Sophomore | 19 | 1 st Yr |
| Cari | Departmental Development | Sophomore | 19 | 1 st Yr |
| Hellen | Student Dinner Series Exec | Sophomore | 19 | 1 st Yr |
| Darcie | Public Relations | Sophomore | 20 | 1 st Yr |

The 2007-08 student leadership group consisted of four returning members, each with one year of experience in the leadership group. Seven new members were selected with one senior, two juniors and four sophomores. By gender, the group consisted of eight females and two males. One member was lost to an internship requirement in the spring term; otherwise all members remained active through the year. Table 1 provides a view of the group members and the positions they held.

Why Join a Student Leadership Group?

The university has an enrollment of over 44,000 students divided into 10 colleges with over 150 undergraduate degrees. The host department is located within the largest college in the university. The department is small with some 350 undergraduate students enrolled and is self contained in a centrally located building on campus. The university has over 800 university recognized student organizations in which students can participate. Almost all students who applied to serve as a member of the student leadership group had some experience with other student organizations on campus. However, most students added that their experience with the level of responsibility for events during the year was much greater with this student leadership group than any organization in which they had participated previously. A few of the past members went on to hold higher positions in other organizations after their experience with the student leadership group. Only one newcomer for the 2007-08 year lacked any type of experience with campus or college level student organizations. Just three of the student leadership group members interviewed for this study began as freshmen in the department, and all others transferred into the department from other majors and colleges

after taking one of the department's classes as an elective. When asked why they joined the student leadership council, three major factors played a role: 1) a love for the department, 2) an opportunity to gain skills and connections in field, and 3) the influence of parents and peers in this process.

Love for Department

During the interviews, it became very apparent that the majority of those who applied to be part of the student leadership organization were very committed to, passionate about, and loved the department. Though their individual stories of what lead them to the department were varied, they consistently spoke of an attraction similar to the following account.

“It (attending the university) was a big adjustment, considering that I had like more people in my class than I did in my entire high school. It is pretty big which is why I liked the major so much because it's small and people knew each other. I'd changed majors like every semester and so I thought 'why not try (the major)', and so I fell in love with it like the first week of classes. I knew it was where I wanted to be.”
(Rene 5/07)

They viewed their membership as a way to give back to and promote the major that they loved so much to others. The members saw this as a way to make their department better for others and promote the impact their major studies has on the lives of others.

“Some people are doing it for different reasons, I was doing it because after I started taking (the major) classes I realized how important it was to me, how much I wanted to give back to the department. Most people who are in (the major) transferred in, everybody who is in it just want to spread the word and let people know about it.”
(Shelley 6/06)

“I just really had a desire to be more involved with (the major) and I was really excited about the program and I wanted to be able to give something back and I

guess some enthusiasm. And then I really liked when going in I thought doing a career day would be really great. And something that would be important to our major and it is tough to find a job... and this is one way students can be helped out more in looking for an internship and looking for a job... it was something I really wanted to do.” (Gabby 5/06)

“I would like to see the department grow and have more people but at the same time I think that our size makes us closer. I think we definitely need to get our message out there that we are not a joke. We are the people that provide people with vacations and we help you have fun so take a serious look at us.” (Micah 10/07)

One member participated in the mentoring program that the student leadership council started for new students in the major, he discussed the impression the group and its president made on him and how that experience lead him to want to join the group.

“They had the mentor program last year and I think I was the only member who ever came and I just started talking to her and I helped with (the career fair) and the more I saw them do and how much of an impact she and the other student leadership council members had made on the department, convinced me to join.” (Micah 10/07)

Interviews with experienced student leadership group members about skills or characteristics that were important to have in new members, commitment, appreciation, passion, and love for the department were among the most common items stated.

“Enthusiasm... and I think a real appreciation of (the major) and the uniqueness of the major and I don’t know I feel like to really be a part of it is being able to give something back to (the major).” (Gabby 5/06)

“Being dedicated is definitely a big thing. But I think what actually set apart a student council member from the regular undergraduate (major) student is having a whole other level of commitment, you’ve got to have passion for this department.” (Sandy 5/07)

Encouragement of Parents and Peers

Students’ participation in the student leadership group was also encouraged by their parents and peers. Several discussed how their peers in the department and

members of student leadership council pushed them to apply for the organization. Both the Past President Diane and President Elect Micah shared some common ground in that both of their fathers worked in careers related to the major and this accounted for why both entered the major directly as freshmen. Both were also key players to recruitment, and were cited as being encouraging to others during the recruitment period for the leadership group.

“Diane, the president, she told me to apply. She had been telling me to apply for a while; we had been friends. I finally said okay.” (Kristen 5/07)

“I had never even heard of it (the student leadership group), and then Micah had told me about it, and he said ‘Cari you really need to apply because it is a student leadership organization and you get to work with the professors on a one to one basis’...” (Cari 4/08)

Their parents encouraged their involvement in the student leadership council.

One other member spoke of how her mother attended the annual departmental banquet and saw the student leadership council members there.

“I went to the banquet and my mom was with me and she was the one that told me that I actually needed to get into it, that it would be a great resume builder and a great way to connect with people.” (Ann 5/06)

An Opportunity to Gain Skills and Connections within the Field

Several reported that their reasons for applying to the student leadership group were related to being involved with the department or major. They viewed this opportunity as a way to meet other people and professors in their department, and they also viewed this organization as more important and leadership oriented than the other student organization affiliated with the department.

“I was looking to get involved in my department and I wanted something um, a little more formal than the Club and more leadership oriented.” (Anita 5/07)

“I just wanted to do something within the major and I really did not want to go with the Club so I chose (the student leadership group) because I thought it was more prestigious. That is not just social. Academically I could make more connections. Better friends.” (Ben 5/07)

“I knew I wanted to get more involved with the department because I didn’t know a lot of my professors and I didn’t know a lot of kids in the department, I transferred in as a sophomore. So I was kind of out of the loop as far as knowing everybody. Everybody seems to know everybody. Well now I a lot of people and that is why – (the student leadership group).” (Marie 5/07)

To conclude research question one, members listed both internal and external motivations for joining the student leadership group. For many, an affinity for the department and the values for which the student leadership group stood were very specific internal reasons for participating in the program. Influences of peers were centered around introjected reasons to participate based on valuing relationships with like-minded peers and being more involved with faculty. Some were encouraged by parents and were encouraged to join based on the external motive of building a resume and connecting with influential people in the field.

During member checks, Anita, the president for year five, stated that she believed some members entered with the idea that they could build their leadership skills or add to their resume. However, as the year moved forward, growing friendships and camaraderie became reasons for sticking with the group. Motivations to join the student leadership organization were remarkably consistent for this group, and many had indicated past involvement on campus with other groups. Most admitted to being very committed to the university in general and were using opportunities like the student leadership group to give back while gaining skills, relationships, contacts and social

capital. The graduate advisor for year five added that he viewed among the members “a desire to be in a leadership position to do things that were visible to the larger community, something that mattered.”

Research Question Two: How Does the Context of a Leadership Council Support Autonomy, Competence and Interpersonal Relatedness?

As mentioned in the Methods chapter, this qualitative case study was framed using Self-Determination Theory and the concept of initiative as a theoretical lens to guide the interpretation of interviews, observations, policies, and other artifacts associated with the review of the student leadership group. Questions in the interview guide were not phrased or designed to ask specifically how autonomy, competence and interpersonal relatedness were supported, however, findings from data analysis centered around themes that demonstrated how support for these three needs were linked. Three major categories of themes emerged in analysis. First, leadership group members and observations revealed a number of supports that were available to them through their involvement with the student leadership group. The second category of themes centered on the personal goals and values of group members that maintained their involvement. The final category describes the skills learned by students through their involvement in the council. Narratives used to describe situations integrate all sources of data collected in the study.

Supports in the Student Leadership Group

Supports in members’ personal development and accomplishments emerged through interactions with faculty and graduate student advisors, student leadership group

officers, policies and practices of the host department, fellow leadership group members and through teamwork and friendships developed with members. This next section describes how these supports functioned to support autonomy, relatedness and competence of those involved with the student leadership group.

Opportunities to Lead

In year two of the student leadership group, Dr. Hudson had basically handed over all decision making to the members. His actions were meant to allow members to work together in developing their ideas and implement programs in which they had ownership; he was allowing them to find their way. This action provided the group with an opportunity to develop as leaders and shape their organization. Dr. Hudson made it clear to his graduate advisor(s) that it was important that they not be the driving force for the organization. The student leadership group members would need to learn how to ask advisors questions, and dictate how the members would involve group advisors on projects. Year two began with the returning leadership group members conducting the interviews. A member selected in year two recalled “I think it (peer interview) is a good way, I have only been through one other interview by a student but it was all so different because they are your peers that are in the same classes so you have to establish a certain, I don’t want to say professionalism but you have to maintain your credibility with the organization.” (Shelley 6/06)

Historical interviews showed while the second year started with a group of enthusiastic members, the student leadership group struggled to stay afloat. This year was plagued with problems as members stopped showing up to meetings and failed to

follow through on developing their ideas into programs. It became quickly obvious that there was no leadership or direction coming from within the group. The group dwindled down to three who were passionate about the group and the department, and these individuals refused to let the leadership group die. They persevered through that spring, and successfully completed group projects in service to their department and community. At the end of that academic year, the remaining members formed a vision of what a successful organization should look like, and worked diligently to begin the year by setting a tone of expectations for all members.

“...their idea was to create folders that would come to the first meeting in the fall with – instead of it being open ended what this person would do and what does this person do. They were defining job descriptions for individuals – they were getting written down – they were setting down expectations for the group. They created a code of expected performance in the group and so when it came to September they were all set with their materials.” (Dr. Hudson 5/06)

An amendment to the constitution removed the shared leadership and created a position of President and Vice President. Diane and Shelley respectively, served in these positions. Meetings in year three became more about where members were in their process of getting their tasks or events prepared. Discussions at meetings were centered on decision-making processes and less on details related to performing projects. In studying the meeting agendas for year three and year four, each individual executive was provided time to give updates on their project progress, members were listed by their names rather than the project. This move appeared to provide more personal ownership to the members themselves.

“As I was examining the resources, what they have or what they were doing and Shelley and Diane had gone through a great deal the prior spring to set up more organization and I am -extremely impressed with how they had put together these

various positions, ideals in how they might function and they were setting up a reporting order but they brought structure to the organization.” (George 10/07)

Leadership emerged in that transition year (year three), but it was the opportunity to lead and be supported to lead that led to the changes and turnaround from year two. Allowing this to happen not only instilled a sense of accomplishment and competence; it also allowed some autonomy for student leaders in developing the direction of the student leadership group. As the group entered year four, it had a president who developed with the organization, which was acknowledged as a successful year--one of growth and recognition for the group as well as their graduate advisor.

Leadership by Example

Diane’s tenure as president during year four brought stability to the organization. She was a founding member, and had remained with the organization despite the turmoil experienced in years past. She used these past challenges to help form a vision of what a successful student group should look like, and this provided clear goals for her and the rest of the group. This was a big step for someone who joined the organization as a way to get to know others; she started out shy and not very confident in her abilities.

In her initial interview she discussed how she would attend meeting after meeting and never say a word until Dr. Hudson encouraged her input. She grew in confidence and matured throughout her tenure with the student leadership council, Dr. Hudson referred to her as the organization’s poster child.

“Diane has absolutely grown up before our eyes here. Her parents tell me that this leadership thing has made a huge difference for her. She was also elected to serve as the departmental representative to the Ag Student Council and she has been successful in getting several scholarships.” (Dr. Hudson 5/07)

She was also very admired by her fellow leadership group members and the skills that she developed through the previous years were very apparent to them.

“I think that Diane is really the best, one of the best presidents I have ever seen – just, I have really taken to heart how she has led groups, because in the past like with me in high school and like in cheerleading and stuff, it just makes me think about how much better I could have done stuff.” (Rene 5/07)

Diane worked during her last year to make it as positive an experience as possible while striving to make it the best year the group had ever experienced. She utilized several tools or forms to stay on top of the progress of events and avoided procrastination on projects by calling members in charge after she had received their progress reports and offering feedback each week.

“Every week we had progress reports due Sunday night, and Ben and I would look at them and offer feedback based on their reports. That was really the best way to make sure the ball was rolling on events wise...” (Diane 5/07)

Diane’s growth in competence and leadership allowed her to facilitate the growth and confidence in others and played a key role in how others reported feeling about their involvement in the student leadership group. When asked about what she had gained from her experience with the student leadership group, she stated that “definitely all the leadership skills and qualities that I have are because of the student leadership group, I haven’t gained anything from anybody else and um definitely all my confidence for sure and what else... better understanding on how people are and how they work, how groups work from the student leadership council, and I really learned a lot about that.”

Departmental Support

Support emerged from all levels of the department. Support was first identified as being important from the faculty and graduate student advisors, but also from other faculty, staff and the head of the department. Students reported a pervasive feeling of support from all levels of the department, which added to their feelings of affinity for the major and their desire to give back to it. During member checks, in comparing her experience in another small college department, Diane emphasized the cooperative environment created by the host department was not just due to its small size but on the unique blend personalities that made up the department.

Dr. Hudson and the graduate student advisors were very accessible for the members of the student leadership group; both attended meetings and encouraged students to contact them when they needed help with situations which might arise. All of the group members interviewed for this study reported on how much they admired the way in which advisors emphasized that leadership was not just about success.

“Words can’t even describe Dr. Hudson. Just the passion that they had for us to succeed was amazing. And it’s kinda like first they were around us all the time and helped us to build things. And once they saw us kind of start to take off on our own and figure out how to handle situations better they just kind of sat back and weren’t really in the role of advisor, they were our mentors. They became more of a helper and a colleague in that sense... I can’t even describe how great they were for us to help us, pushing us always, and letting us know that we’d done a good job. And if it doesn’t work out right, ‘that’s okay’, its maybe ‘the first time we had done this’, ‘we’re learning’, and ‘this is a learning process’. We’re building something and it’s going to be great in the future.” (Ann 5/06)

The outcome of the final organizational project became secondary to group growth and the processes that occurred throughout the year. One student described how she fell behind in her duties for the student leadership group, she thought that they were

calling her in to a meeting to ask her to leave but instead she found that they were concerned about her.

“George called me in and indicated that we noticed you are falling behind on some of your projects. I explained to him what was going on (personal struggles at home) and they said ‘okay, we just needed to know’. I felt like gosh someone cares that shouldn’t. They set aside time to set an appointment with me to find out what was going on because they cared. They didn’t need to do that but I needed to spill my guts to someone who wasn’t close to me. It offered almost like a counseling thing... they cared and this was a school program. They effectively told me what I need to do as far as steps to take to get myself back on track and that helped me a lot.”
(Marie 5/07)

There was both an internal support system within the group and an external system that included their advisors, other faculty members and staff in the department. As graduate advisors, both George and Steven transitioned slowly into the position, allowing the students to set the tone of their relationships.

“I think I soft pedaled my way in. I wasn’t as focused in managing, leading, dictating, I was pretty focused on rapport, and it was very natural for me to.”
(George 10/07)

“I tried to establish relationships with each of the members, but maybe coming in mid-stream made that less natural to come talk to me.” (Steven 5/08)

The members of the student leadership group recognized the support the group received on a daily basis from the faculty and staff in their department. They discussed in their interviews that nothing could have happened at any of their events, especially those based in their building, if it were not for this department-wide support. This support may speak to the reason that the students were so committed to the department.

“That is probably why I chose this major just because you walk down the halls and the professors know your name. People you see know your name, advisor, everybody knows your name. You do not have to schedule appointments but I say

that; I think that I only scheduled one appointment here. It is a lot nicer, it is more personal...". Ben (5/06)

"...overall the faculty just kind of stood back, they weren't at meetings but when we needed them they stood up and they will help us out too. That kind of how this department is, they kind of make us all close knit." (Sandy 5/07)

Of staff they recounted, "Without them (support staff) nothing could have happened and nothing would get out. And they were always there, whenever we are doing anything, Career Fair, Spirit Saturday, anything. They played such a big part in all that we did, that you'd have to mention them, if I was giving a speech about what we did this year we would have to mention all of them." (Sandy 5/07)

In discussing other similar department students' representative organizations within the college, the members realized a distinction in how their group was allowed to function as opposed to others. This insight came after several meetings with the college's student council with representatives from the other departments.

"It sounded like they were told what to do and couldn't do anything on their own or have any of their ideas on things and I was like oh this is the opposite of us. Our advisors just sit back and let us do whatever we want and they're there to save us before we destroy something or getting into big trouble but the other student leadership groups are very, very different from us which I thought was really interesting and I don't know why but I got the impression that the other leadership groups' department heads were maybe more involved or strict or I don't know but we are more deciding and hands on." (Diane 5/07)

Autonomy through voice and choice played a great role in retaining group membership during the last few years. This was a student leadership group of committed members, with their advisors, department faculty and staff there for support rather than to direct.

Relatedness from Group Members

Perhaps, the greatest support discussed by the members of this organization was that which they received from their fellow members while accomplishing their events, tasks, and goals. One member summed up her thoughts about the guidance she received from her president by saying that “she was so positive and really builds inspiration and makes you feel like you are doing something that’s worthwhile, even if it’s just picking up balloons for Spirit Saturday. You just – she makes you feel that you are needed and she was just amazing, I think”. (Rene 5/07)

In describing year four, one member stated:

“...literally there were so many roadblocks we should have had, just personal things that happened to each of us. We had two grandpas that died, mine included and I was in a really bad car accident... I mean there were a lot of things that we all could have just kind of fallen apart over there, but somebody was always there to pick up the slack and somebody will kind of create it on purpose or because of the circumstances whatever it is. So, we had a successful year.” (Sandy 5/07)

That same member later emphasized the importance of members support to being in the student leadership group when she said “I think it helped temper the month of March and making it like, ‘you still have things to do, and you love doing this, and you know you are still alive’, I think it actually helped me stay balanced.

Accomplishment through Teamwork

Teamwork and working together were common place in all discussions in recalling events and situations throughout the year. Many members come into the group with personal goals and adopted group goals as well. Despite their differences, they recognized how others could help them achieve those goals.

“...each one of us is different, and we each had different personal goals for the most part, and we all had different expectations and goals for the group as a whole, and I think all of us working together and getting to know one another enabled us all to accomplish our personal goals as well as the group’s goals. So it’s like you have personal goals and goals for the group, but you can’t do it all on your own. So the group was there to help, even to get your own personal things done. If I was late to every meeting they’d be like Gage get here on time. They made you want to change and accomplish; I think most of the goals were accomplished because of the group work.” (Gage 4/08)

Other members supported Gage’s views, and specifically discussed how the group helped them strive to perform better. Group processes supported time management, avoiding procrastination, and helped members get tasks finished.

“...it’s helped me try not to procrastinate as much because we had to keep on top of the schedule we set for ourselves. And it’s shown me I can accomplish a lot of things and how to work with people.” (Katy 5/06)

“I thought like I said like it was one of the best working units that I ever been part of.” (Gabby 5/06)

“...we were really able to help out whenever Micah needed us for career fair, he could just call us up and we’d be there to help. And Aggieland Saturday, that was fun, we were all there together.” (Cari 4/08)

The group helped them realize that other members, fellow students, staff and professors were counting on their success. They learned that their failure meant group failure, and when their success was tied to group success. One graduate advisor added that “it was a powerful message for the individual, and it was powerful message for the group. Regardless of who is the weakest link, if we don’t support the weakest link, we don’t support the student leadership council.” (George 10/07)

When asked about what abilities were most important for new members, the most common response from those interviewed was related to being a good team player and

supporting those around you. Clearly, members from this group functioned best when they adopted this mentality, and this was modeled by members from previous years.

Development of Lasting Friendships

Aside from working together as a team, some members felt that the group's function was tied to developing friendships—relationships that they believed would last a lifetime. When asked about what positives were tied to belonging to the group, end of year interviews provided insight into these growing relationships:

“I think the friendships that we've built; we really became a cohesive group. And working together, since at the very beginning I think I was kind of worried that we had so many different people and opinions. But I think right after the break, finally, when career fair came up and that was such a success, to see all of us kind of, even though it was mostly the executives, but it kind of trickled down to us, and once it came the day of, it's like there's nothing to do but sit back and relax. And we all became very close because of it.” (Cari 4/08)

“I guess we really became friends. I mean, it was just nice to be able to trust people for once and know that they can help you and that you could count on them. It was nice.” (Rene 5/07)

It appeared that group bonding in the spring and around the group's larger events occurred each year. These tight bonds between members at the end of the year were evident even when these groups experienced difficulties in the fall semester.

“I think it was kinda neat to see how we all pulled together... like the stages of norming and forming and stuff... I think we kind of bonded after the fall...” (Marie 4/07)

However, it might be that the challenges faced early in the year help foster this bond, as members starting at mid-year did not experience the same feelings of success,

“It was kinda hard for the council member to just jump in, it was kind of jumbled up a group dynamic with a new member coming into a group that has been together for the year and just I don't know, just kind of put us in reverse for a short time until we

all got comfortable working as a group again and then we were able to go.” (Diane 5/07)

Diane’s comments emphasize that the unity reported by members was best experienced by those that had started in the fall.

There were also those who benefited from the other end of the spectrum, accomplishing their events or tasks without the need of others’ input or help. In this case, feelings of accomplishment were derived from a sense of freedom.

“I’ve never been so I guess... in charge of my own destiny in the group. Like I had my program and that was my program and I was in charge of who ever went on to it, and everything that happened with it was for me and especially for my particular one it was like only me I didn’t have a partner or whatever it wasn’t like an event where everyone had to pull together to come to... there weren’t really any requirements or anybody else to run it, there is just me. I have never been in that position.” (Anita 5/07)

Members in charge of projects worked to leave as much information in their email group’s website. This information served to provide the new members access to forms, letters, and calling scripts which described how they accomplished tasks or events.

“We have all our information saved and loaded up and the student leadership group has the yahoo groups group and we loaded our files and all the contact information. The forms that we used and the letters that we used so all that will be available to the people who will be selected next year.” (Gabby 5/07)

When conducting member checks, findings were discussed by taking members interviewed through each component and asking if they agreed or disagreed with them and whether they had anything to add. The members agreed that these relational and developmental supports were present in their experiences during their time with the leadership group. Diane emphasized that the greatest support to group functioning were

the leadership opportunities that Dr. Hudson and the graduate advisors provided. By supporting their “voice” and giving the group an opportunity to implement their ideas, the faculty and graduate advisors let this group define the roles and function of the group. This proved to be beneficial in that it allowed for members to find and do activities that were personally meaningful and internally motivating.

Personal Goals and Values

Beyond relational supports, many of the student council members reported that their involvement and heightened engagement was attributed to realizing personal goals and doing work within the council that was consistent with their values. These internalized motives reinforced their commitment to the work and made involvement with the student council seemingly more valuable.

Setting Out to Accomplish

All members of the student leadership group had individual goals that they hoped to achieve. These goals ranged from getting to know others to developing a network that would help them academically and, later, in their search for future employment. Some of their goals were discussed previously when asked about why they sought to become members of the student leadership group. Some goals were developed as part of their program responsibility for the council.

“The goal for myself is to be a good enough leader so that everything gets done. I want the group to keep the caliber of what it was last year and if there is improvement then that’s awesome. And I want to make sure that the change of leadership between me and Diane doesn’t degrade, or bring this group back, because Diane was a leader for three years, I didn’t want it to be where it has to step back in order to go forward. I want it to keep going in the direction its going.” (Anita 10/07)

Most members interviewed from years one through five felt that they achieved at least one of their personal goals and several of the organizational goals. However, several members involved in the 2007-08 year (year five) felt that organizational and personal goals were not achieved during this year of service. Implications related to not realizing these goals are addressed in content related to research question three.

Getting to Know Others

Getting to know people within the department was very important to almost all the members, especially those who had transferred in and were fairly new to the department. They believed that the student leadership group would provide more opportunities to get to know fellow students, faculty and staff better and also to grow a network which could possibly lead to future employment. One member stated in the fall that she “would like to learn how to make the connections with who I need to make the connections with. To be able to help me in the future with whatever job I end up doing, through those connections that help with my academics and my career goals.” (Cari 10/07) And when asked at the end of the year if she had fulfilled that goal she said that she definitely met others and became closer to the professors and graduate students in conducting their projects.

Being a Good Leader

Being a good leader was very important for both new and returning members. They wanted to learn how to create a project and see it to the end, whether working alone or in partnership with others. Working with others, delegating responsibilities, and

dividing up the work as needed were especially valuable lessons learned by members, especially for the big projects that were more time consuming.

“I hope to gain more ability to start programs and put them on from start to finish. This is my first year that I am able to do it on my own and before there was always someone there with me.” (Cari 10/07)

Cari continued this discussion by adding that this ability would help to prepare her for the ‘real world’. ‘Real world’ situations were discussed more than once, as students saw the opportunities they encountered during their tenure as preparatory and likely to be repeated in their future.

“I think being in a leadership position will open up many doors once I’m in the real world. You have the opportunity to say I have done this, I have been in charge, I have run something. I think people will look at you and say this is something you’ve accomplished; we’ll let you give this a whirl.” (Gage 10/07)

Giving Back

Members of the leadership group in each organizational year indicated that giving back to the department they loved so much was very important to them. Several came with the desire to give back, and even though the results of their work will not be realized until after they graduate, these members still strove to do their best.

“As far as my role (recruitment), I’ve thought about it a lot... I don’t really know how you measure in terms of recruitment, that is something hard to measure, how many people you actually influence to change their degree and come to the department”... but he did want people to know that being in this department did not single your career goal at all.” (Gage 10/07)

“In terms of giving back, I feel that as a group we were able to do that. I think we were involved, I think just getting things organized and getting things done, which is what we are supposed to do, but was giving back in its own way, which I guess I really didn’t see in the beginning. The Career Fair was our way of giving back, I didn’t have to do anything particular because we all worked as a group and got things done.” (Gage 4/08)

Members also saw that they had a role as good representatives of the department. Beyond being representatives, they also cited themselves as role models to other students. Micah put it this way,

“...just to develop myself as a member of (the major) and to represent the organization or our department to the campus and hopefully to other people who could be potential students. I am setting an example for future and current student in how to represent our department in public and how far we will go in our field. I believe that all of us are going to be some of the top leaders in our field.”

Completion of Programs and Projects

Completing their tasks or events better than before was a topic that came up frequently, and was often motivation for persevering and sticking through projects.

“I think one of them (goals) is definitely getting things done on time. And making them better, especially with the group’s newsletter and announcements and the way I’d like to evaluate that kind of thing...” (Marie 10/07)

“I guess my goals for the next year would be, keep the programs going and make them a bigger and better thing.” (Anita 5/07)

At the end of the year five they were able to sit back and talk about their successes in accomplishing their goals for programming with some satisfaction in a job well done.

“Spirit Saturday went great. We had a lot of people show up and the people that did show up I feel we reached them well.” (Gage 4/08)

“It was amazing how much I put into it and the result was amazing. People said it was the best student-run career fair they’ve ever been to and the amount of work we put in it was great to hear the feedback like from the professors and the organization and students.” (Micah 4/08)

Their graduate advisor agreed that in general the student leadership group had a great semester and all the events went well with a lot of positive feedback. He never

doubted that they would be able to complete their tasks and activities despite some minor setbacks.

Leadership Growth in Members

Micah joined the group with a long-term goal to be president before graduating from the department. He achieved that goal and since has set some major goals for himself and the organization as a whole. He has already started to lay out the foundation for the 2008-09 school year. Recognizing that he cannot accomplish anything without other members, he has met with his officers and the graduate student advisor to work towards meeting these new goals. He affirmed his hope to start the year off well during our last discussion when he said:

“...one of the first things I am going to next year, as a group, maybe start this summer but, set goals for each committee. So specifically for the career fair the goal will be to put on a career fair for the students, and have some objectives set. And then the members will agree to them, be open for interpretation or change, but then they’re going to be set, and that way they have a way to take them, set a task to accomplish that goal.”

During member checks, the preceding items were discussed and those interviewed agreed that they could relate to these descriptions on a personal level, and had witnessed them in their fellow leadership group members. Anita added that one of the most important things that she hoped for was establishing a very cohesive group of members and getting projects completed. She felt that she accomplished that goal.

Gaining Skills and Personal Benefits

On a number of occasions, group members and advisors mentioned the working world skills and developmental benefits associated with participation in the student leadership group. Communication skills, problem solving and time management were

among the skills developed, while personal growth took the form of confidence, greater understanding and empathy, improved relationships, and a sense of purpose.

Descriptions of each follow.

Enhancement of Communication Skills

Overwhelmingly, members attributed growth in communication skills to their membership in the student leadership group. Members discussed that growth was evident in how they talked to each other, worked through department classes with announcements, marketed their program outside of the department, and learned to talk to people that held high positions of authority on campus or in the business realm. Several, especially those that participated in the career fair, felt that learning to write formal business letters was especially helpful.

“And I also felt like it was a good chance ...like we really did represent the major...like we were the ones making the announcements about the events in class and bringing these events to the students. I felt like that was really important and like I got the chance like to write emails to that would go out to everyone in the major. Get up in front of class and tell them what was coming up and definitely the whole organization of the career fair like gave me the chance to talk professionals and write professional business letters that were going to I would say fairly important people. I would work with the department head like to get money and you know there was a lot involved in that. And it gave you a lot of different experiences as far as organizations, and leadership and communications.” (Gabby 5/07)

Problem Solving

Members also talked about how they developed their problem solving abilities. Specifically, these individuals reported learning how to approach situations critically, even when they found themselves in what appeared to be tough situations. They felt that other members were especially valuable in reinforcing critical thinking skills while serving as sounding boards and providing advice that confirmed ideas and generated

new solutions. This member from years two and year three discussed problem solving and critical thinking in this passage:

“It really taught me to be an equal and with everybody being so different um...we have...so many different personalities and thoughts, um...I could be thinking one thing and not even going in one direction and great to see how somebody else can view it and I really have learned to value other peoples opinion and what they have to say because two minds are better than one nine are better than one.” (Shelley 6/06)

While many reported learning from positive experiences, a few were able to relay stories where challenge helped develop problem solving skills and became the basis for learning. Shelley shared this:

“I learned more from my mistakes and from the more negative things happening than anything you can actually or that’s given to you in reward or achievements is learning from your failures and your hard times and how you get threw them because now looking at where I am right now and I look at what everything that happened this year and just say... we got through that and we worked through those problems so...” (Shelley 6/06)

Time Management

Several members mentioned that learning time management and avoiding procrastination became central to their performance in the group. Through their efforts in the group, members reported valuing their time more and learning how to balance time to achieve their personal objectives, while meeting group responsibilities. One member talked about making sure she committed to working to preserve her time on Tuesday for group work only. The student leadership group met on Tuesdays, and she used this time to balance her responsibilities to the group. This required managing and planning her time to meet other duties and responsibilities for school, as in this example:

“Like this week has been planned out to the exact minute almost. Trying to manage projects and exams and stuff like that. I learned early on in this semester that on

Tuesday nights I have to allow myself the weekend before to do my homework if I have anything due on Wednesday because if I wait until Tuesday night then something is bound to come up.” (Cari 10/07)

The bottom line for most was articulated best by Ben, who replied to questions about what skills he had gained very simply with:

“Time management, time management”. (Ben 5/07)

Building Confidence

The work with the student leadership group also gave rise to their sense of confidence. The following quote exemplifies an experience shared by many members. In this passage, Rene discusses that she soon learned to feel confident through the support and acceptance of others:

For example, I think confidence in my own ideas has gone up. I still am the type of person who says I think I had this idea, and I really like it, but I don’t know if it will work. At least now I am not afraid to bring it forth and say hey this is my idea, and this is why it will work. And at the same time, I am also not as hurt when it is shot down, because I can understand where it’s coming from and why it wouldn’t work. So I would say it’s a big confidence booster. And to know that I can produce something from class or anything, other than just papers, is amazing. And I think that really helps real-world applications. (Rene 5/07)

Greater Understanding of the Big Picture

Members grew to see the difference they could make as members of the leadership group. One member discussed how the experience helped him and the others to gain a greater understanding of their department and their chosen major.

“We become more, more involved in not only the university but in the department as well, and helped to put a desire to actually you know just not go through (the major) just not go through my major. You know and actually understand my major and understand why we do the things we do, because I know people that just go through their major, ahh just want to do this. Just for a piece of paper.” (Gage 4/08)

Another succinctly stated in reference to the group's success that "since we are in the business of people, you know, we understand what has to be done". (Ben 5/07)

Development of Relationships

Relationships that members developed through the leadership group were considered one of the great benefits of belonging to the group. These relationships became the basis for a lot of the growth that occurred within the group, and established a level of trust among the group members with each other and those key staff and members within the department.

"I would say it was rewarding, and I know pretty much that's a cliché term, obviously I can say it was because I got to meet a lot of great students and then also I got to do a lot with the faculty and staff which is really valuable especially to an undergraduate..." (Sandy 5/07)

Establishing a Sense of Future Purpose

The members also felt that much of their experience with the student leadership group would be beneficial to them on a personal level and in preparation for their future careers in the field. This can be seen as one of the purposes of college, a means to prepare young people to take on the challenges that the "real world" has to offer them. Their faculty advisor summed it up very nicely.

"...the purpose of college is to gain knowledge and skills and academics way to go out, find, and function in jobs in the world. But there is a lot more to life in terms of jobs, there is a lot more to a job than doing duties and even doing your duties many of these jobs require interaction with others. If I think of the notion of what, at least I preach that youth development is all about. We talk about earning an income, we talk about being able to establish successful relationships other people and we talk about being a good citizen. And it seems to me that groups like this relate in some way to all of those, in terms of getting a job, I think these things look good on a resume. It is teaching work habits, teaching follow through so it is not getting the job initially but having some skills that will help you move up the line along with the abilities that you develop within the job." (Dr. Hudson 5/06)

The members agreed that much of what they did prepared them for life in their future careers. One member stated that:

“our major is really about working with people and the programs that we put on are lot about working with people and I thought that was an outstanding point and it really is good preparation you know like I said getting experience writing letters and talk to professionals and putting on events and speaking to people in front of you class. These are all things that you know are beneficial as far as careers and I think a lot of people in group feel the same way.” (Gabby 5/07)

Member checks confirmed that several of these themes related to skills and benefits were present throughout the existence of the program in all years.

**Research Question Three: What Experiences within the Leadership Council
Detract from Self-determination and Initiative?**

Until this point, we have focused on the positives outcomes of membership in the student leadership group. While many group members had favorable things to say about the group, the experience was not always pleasant for all members. Several members left the group due to overwhelming commitments in school work, their membership in other organizations, or just their lack of commitment to the organization. One member was unable to stay in the student leadership group because her grade point fell under the guidelines that they had set for the organization. This last section identifies the situations that detracted from self-determination and initiative and outlines those disruptive processes that can occur within the framework of a student leadership group.

Feeling Lost

Many of the discussions with members about negative experiences with the leadership group were directed to members being unclear about the purpose of the

leadership group. Early in the group's history, these experiences could be seen in reports by members about a lack of understanding regarding the purpose of the organization. Later this took the form of the responsibilities associated with specific positions in the group. Responding to these concerns, members in the 2006-07 year or year four made efforts to orient all new members to the purpose and roles of all group members. Despite these changes, new members in 2007-08 felt lost, and this reflected a lack of transition to new members.

“I think internally, we are pretty organized, but I don't think that organization has been – like I feel kinda lost, I don't feel like its being presented as well, cause I don't feel like I have a good grasp on, I know I'm in charge of recruitment, but I don't have a grasp on what that means. I don't know if I have to go to places, or people come here and I take care of it or how to even begin that process. But I feel like the people who've already done it are organized. They just haven't expressed it to the new members.” (Gage 10/07)

Lack of Communication

Lack of communication between the members was also a cause of some problems or misunderstanding within the group. Their advisor observed that members were not conveying their needs or plans to the rest of the group.

“I think it goes back to the whole thing of, this being very individualized, and so it was sort of like we all showed up for Spirit Saturday, but nobody really knew what was going on outside of Sandy and Gage. And so there were issues, like we showed up and there weren't things to hand out, and banners hadn't been made, and it was under control, but the rest of the group didn't really know. And we discussed it in meetings but once again going back to communication, meetings weren't always the most effective.” (Steven 5/08)

Failure to Bond

Some returning members noticed early in 2007-08 year that new members were not bonding to the group as in years past. One reason for this lack of bonding related to

how work was scheduled within the group. In past years, members were assigned a project for the fall. In 2007-08, this was not the case, and members met without direction or purpose. Marie noted that she felt this kept the group from getting to know each other and eventually bond.

“I just really wish that we would bond as a group, kind of unify, because it’s hard enough getting stuff done when you love people and are connected, and when there’s distance it makes it even harder. So I don’t know if its teambuilding exercises we need, or what, but I feel like, I know last year we even did a social where people met.” (Marie 10/07)

Lack of Trust

During the 2007-08 year or year five, members didn’t feel trusted at times to fulfill their duties, and this led one member to sum up the lack of development in the group with this comment,

“I think it somewhat defeats the purpose of the organization because it is leadership development, and in order to do that you have to be given responsibility, and as far as her role she kind of didn’t have the trust in the other members that things would get done. So she would just do them, and then I think it was a bad cycle because she felt overloaded, but the responsibilities were never allowed to be filled by the people they were supposed to be filled by.” (Sidney 4/08)

This member as well as others mentioned the fact that they didn’t know who the other officers were. It was noted by this observer in e-mail communication between members that meetings were called off by the president if she was ill or had other commitments; no other officers were given the opportunity to take charge of meetings.

In year five the president was seen as failing to delegate responsibilities. In this example, a high school tour was planned for the department. The president took it upon herself to coordinate the tour, rather than delegate this responsibility. In this quote we see that she felt she had no other choice:

“I was just thinking about this the other day, about how maybe having that vice president position is kind of where, you know you get up to such a high position that you don’t really have anything to do. And maybe trying to, I don’t know, get her involved. Because Gage took over with the recruitment thing, and all of it kind of fell to me, through the academic advisor, the one who knew everything about it. She gave it all to me, and it was coming up so fast that I didn’t have time to get Sandy up to speed on it. And so, I just said, Dr. Smith, Dr. Barney, meet me over there and I’ll take care of it type thing. I wasn’t able to call Sandy and say, okay, can you do this, can you get Dr. Smith and Dr. Barney, yada yada. But I felt that was the best decision at the time to do it that way, but I kind of saw, with the meeting, whenever Sandy was like, “what happened with that”, she would have wanted to help.” (Anita 10/07)

The 2007-08 or year five president did not appear to trust Sandy to follow through with the visit on short notice, and took the role of scheduling and planning the high school visit. The year before, Sandy was considered by the former president as someone who could get things done quickly and efficiently. She said that Sandy was one of the most considerate members of the student leadership group in handling her responsibilities to the group and felt as though she would make an excellent officer. Sandy was also described by her fellow members as being very flexible and laid-back but she did say that after this incident she got a touch of “senioritis” and perhaps became too lackadaisical in her responsibilities to the group in the fall. However, she also reported that not being involved or having the opportunity to be involved contributed to her overall disassociation from the group.

Meetings Lacked Structure

Interviews with the graduate student advisor revealed that meetings were not as structured as they could have been. Meetings during the fall were observed, and notes from those observations reported that meetings lasted between 30-75 minutes. One

meeting during which time they discussed ordering new Reps t-shirts, over 30 minutes was spent on deciding what color and style.

“There were some times when I’d be in meetings, or things, and it’s just like, if we could focus this meeting would take 10 minutes, but it’s been an hour because we’re doing nothing. Then there are other times when it’s, I don’t know if it’s the mood or the setting but you’re just kind of lackadaisical, and I don’t really have much to do, and the meeting could take 10 minutes and it’s taking an hour, but it doesn’t matter because you’re enjoying the company and everything. So I think that’s a situational thing. But there were times when it would get a little snappy, or Anita would get a little snappy, because we weren’t focused or doing the exact thing, and there were a lot of times, a lot of things I didn’t experience because I couldn’t do a lot of the outside. (Gage 4/08)

The last meeting of the fall term was used as an opportunity to evaluate the year to that point. Members brought up many different points that were discussed in the meeting. Through this meeting members spoke out about the role of president in the group. Many felt that the president was too negative and often focused on what was not being accomplished. This president rarely focused on seeing and recognizing the positive functions within the group. Though they believed that she could be very laid-back and flexible at times, they felt that her communications skills were very curt at times. And they told her “don’t try to take our job... don’t micro-manage... don’t take it over.”

However, the same method of leadership continued into the spring term and the frustration was noted by leadership group members about situations even outside of meetings.

“I feel like the meetings could have been run more smoothly. And I feel at times like her guidance wasn’t shown as well as it could have. She came off really harsh, so I was very intimidated by her. And then I realized why am I intimidated, there’s nothing really to be intimidated about. But she wasn’t very welcoming whenever a few of us had a question, by chance we all ended up calling her that night, and I felt

when I called I was bothering her, or that she was mad. And so, I feel that she had a negative approach to everything...” (Cari 4/08)

The former president was noted for her ability to inspire others, encouragement to lead others, her overall positive attitude and her enthusiasm in all situations. Leaders set the tone for the entire organization and this sense of negativity and lack of trust in others will stifle growth opportunities for individuals. From observations of group meetings it was noted that the president would often take calls and engage in text messaging during meetings. This was confirmed by group members as well, and taken as a lack of respect to the members. Despite this negative response to their leader the group members were able to successfully accomplish their activities and move forward.

When performing a member check with the past president, Diane, she stated that these same problems occurred to some degree during her tenure. She noted that, at times, some members did not feel trusted. She also noted that as president, she sometimes failed to trust some members to complete their projects. She stated that she often felt as though she had to carry other officers’ duties, but added that she understood that some were pressed for time as they worked to support themselves through school. Her rationale for stepping up in these situations was related to her being available where others were not.

Like her predecessor, Anita, the president for year five (2007-08) agreed that there were some members she did not trust to complete their tasks. These feelings of mistrust were the prime reason for not delegating tasks to other officers.

In discussing the lack of structure in meetings, Anita reasoned that she felt that her desire to create a cohesive group lead to some disorder at meetings when she did not

want to disrupt the off-task conversations taking place as she noted that much of the bonding between members took place during the weekly meetings. She added that the contrast to the meeting structure in year four was notably different, in that George (the graduate advisor) would facilitate more discussion at meetings, which was beneficial to the members and organization while adding more structure to meeting.

She also noted the concerns that new members had in regards to a perceived lack of communication may have grown from her belief that it was important that she provide members with information about the organization, the organizational expectations and their position duties and how they processed that information was part of building their own leadership skills. She did not believe that providing a detailed plan on how to accomplish all their tasks would be beneficial to the members. She reasoned that using that method would serve only to stunt their personal growth as leaders.

Despite some of the negative experiences, members reported growth and development in personal and professional skills for the future. They attributed success even in tough times, which demonstrates how valuable group processes were for reflecting and learning.

Negative Experiences: An Impetus for Action

What was most impressive about this leadership group was how it responded to perceived adversity. Based on some members' perceptions, year five seemed filled with frustration. However, it appears that many of the challenges and ensuing frustration experienced by members led to positive change. The incoming president for 2008-09 is working towards evaluating the last year with his officers to make sure that next year

they will be able to have fun accomplishing their activities. Setting a positive team working atmosphere from the beginning is his goal. Other officers noted that they have ideas to cut down on all the individual conversations during meetings by starting with “a once around, like how was everyone’s day. And that kind of gives everyone time to share their two cents, and then go on and have a meeting. Keep it more positive and open outlook on things.” (Cari 4/08)

The new slate of officers is very excited about their roles in setting the tone for the upcoming year. One officer noted:

“Micah is gonna be next year’s president and I think that’s going to be a really good thing. He wants to meet with all of the officers for next year and kind of get an idea of where we want to take the organization. So I think he’s going to do a better job of involving everyone and making sure that, decision making and powers are distributed evenly. I think he has some pretty good ideas for where he wants the organization to go next year.”

And she added that she sees him as “a natural leader”.

“He’s really involved with a lot of different things on campus, and he really knows how to relate to people. And I think he gets his voice across in a really neutral, calm way, which I think is going to be important, and an added, good asset to the group next year.” (Sidney 4/08)

Summary

This writer would like to have simply focused on all the positive points that were raised about the students’ involvement in this organization and how they grew from their experience. The students as well generally focused on the positives in their interviews, but when asked if there were things that were negative or presented challenge, they were able to provide accounts that reflected some of the experiences that presented avenues for personal and professional growth. Some provided this information with the

understanding that it could serve as a basis for identifying practices that promote positive group functioning. An important idea that emerged in spite of some of the negative experiences with the year five is that sometimes it helps to hit a bump along the road. It may lead to new understanding, learning and personal growth. The experiences of leadership group members and advisors from year four and year five cohorts provided a rich description of how student leadership programs at universities function, what makes them effective and what makes them ineffective.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative study examined the developmental opportunities for supporting self-determination and initiative for college students participating in a university-sponsored, leadership group. The student participants, two graduate advisors and the faculty advisor were interviewed and meetings observed over a period of 12 months. Preliminary interviews with six outgoing members to gain an organizational with historical perspective and a review of written records were also completed. Thirty-three informal interviews took place, 11 meetings were observed and several unplanned visits with leadership group members took place during the course of the research period. This study sought to answer the following research questions: 1) Why do leadership council members join and continue with the leadership council?; 2) How does the context of a leadership council support autonomy, competence and interpersonal relatedness?; and 3) What experiences within the leadership council detract from self-determination and initiative? This chapter will present a summary of the findings and a discussion of how these findings fit in the literature.

Summary of Findings

This student leadership organization started because the university's administration sought to create positive out-of-class opportunities for students that would increase the quality of student involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991, 2005, Kuh et.al 1995, 2005). In 2003, the university president called for more leadership opportunities to be developed within all colleges and departments. The rationale behind

this action was to enhance the university experience, by providing a well-rounded education that focused on connected learning experiences. Students who made the decision to apply for the leadership group did so for various but similar reasons. The majority of the members interviewed for this study transferred into the department after taking a class they enjoyed; only three began in the department as freshmen. However, they all felt a commitment or passion for the department and major that they had chosen, and they had a desire to give something back. Several viewed the organization as a means to become more involved and connect with the other students, the professors, and the staff that made up the department. They also saw it as a means to further advance their knowledge and understanding of the major and their opportunities for building a career path. Some were influenced or encouraged to participate in the organization by returning members, their peers and their parents.

Some students discussed how they joined for one reason, such as enhancing their resume, and then through their involvement in the organization, a particular event or activity enabled them to see the impact they were making for others in their major and department. These instances gave them a sense of satisfaction that they had never experienced before. High satisfaction by students is important to their personal and academic success (Astin, 1984; Astin, 1999). Satisfaction was linked closely to competence, as members gained leadership skills and accomplished their initial goals. Competence was also enhanced outside the group as these individuals became known as the “go to” people or student leaders for the department. Most met other personal goals that they had set for themselves or the organization throughout their time as members.

By appealing to their sense of competence, members identified closely with the work they were doing within the leadership group, and this became motivation for continued involvement and wanting to represent their department and their group.

Members also gained many skills that will benefit them as they progress through their lives, college and future careers. Members discussed developing skills related to communication, time management, problem solving, and teamwork. All felt that they gained confidence, knowledge, and abilities through their experiences and exposure to faculty, staff and graduate students while serving in the student leadership group. These skills and abilities should translate well out of college and enable these students to function in a variety of different employment situations. This adds further credence to the idea that colleges and universities are vital to preparing emerging adults (Arnett, 2000) for their future and meeting the challenges set forth by Pittman and her colleagues (2003).

Key to these gains and positive development were their advisors, department faculty and staff, all of whom were resources who helped the members of the leadership group in their growth. Their advisors determined early in this process that the students would lead their organization and that their role would be to help guide only when asked. By allowing student leadership group to determine activities and programs the advisors provided a setting in which it was less likely for students to participate in activities that had absolutely no intrinsic value to them. This structure also provided for the development of autonomy as students could choose projects that required both individual and group decisions to be made. Ryan & Deci emphasize that autonomy

support is a critical element for internalization, and when youth and young adults learn to internalize behavior, they are better prepared to take on behaviors that are often obligatory and common in adulthood.

Faculty-student relationships are vital to student success as discussed by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), students who participated in this study indicated that their love for the department grew from their interaction with the faculty, staff, and students. Curricula developed by faculty members in the host department included intensive writing assignments, group projects, and community service projects on and off the physical college campus. Together these elements can work towards developing social and personal competence (Reason, Terenzini & Domingo 2007). Relatedness from faculty and staff, kept students connected to those working in the department and further enhanced how they identified with department objectives and activities.

Faculty provided themselves as resources for events and activities held throughout the year. The staff also helped these student leaders in accomplishing their tasks while abiding to departmental and university structure and rules of order. A perceived supportive learning environment developed by the host department provide for involvement and growth in these student leaders (Astin, 1984; Astin, 1999). The advisors, faculty and staff provided the necessary structure for the student leaders to succeed in their efforts towards meeting their mission to provide growth opportunities for their members and the departmental community. All members focused mainly on the positives of their time with the student leadership group, how it impacted their personal growth and how the experience will manifest itself throughout their lives.

However, their time in student leadership group was not always positive, but through the experience they learned another powerful lesson, not all success is gained through outcomes but through process. Leadership group members discussed those incidences or circumstances that may have thwarted their growth such as feeling lost, lack of communication or direction from the officers, a failure to bond with some members, and a lack of trust. At times members failed to feel supported, appreciated or useful, elements essential to positive development. Failure to meet these needs may have resulted in the members' separation from the leadership group; however these same members made the decision to rise above these constraints, and received support from others within the group. It should be noted that no members left the organization during the research period other than through graduation and an internship move. The officers for the coming school term have made a goal to work together to prevent any member from feeling unwanted or unappreciated, and this change in policy was directly influenced by the challenges they experienced within the group. While the 2007-08 year was rocky at times, it proved to be one in which returning members experienced initiative, and learned from it.

Discussion

This qualitative case study of a small leadership group used Self-Determination Theory and the concept of initiative as lenses to understand the why college students join student leadership groups, how that membership was sustained, and what detracted from the experience of membership in this student leadership group. This study sought to extend or add to the literature on contexts that promote positive youth development by

focusing on a college setting. College settings are not typically studied as youth development contexts, but colleges and universities have moved to examining goals beyond academic achievement and recognize their role in preparing young men and women for adulthood (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1997).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) remind us that “human development takes place through processes between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment.” (p. 996) The findings of this study indicated that development indeed took place on a regular basis over an extended period of time indicative of the opportunities in which the development of initiative can occur (Larson, 2000). For one member it took place over her four years in college as a member with growing responsibilities each year. Her experiences were most vivid in this study, as advisors, faculty, and fellow group members shed light on her tenure with the leadership group. For others with shorter time in the group, initiative was evident in how they dealt with adversity to make changes in policy, and maintained consistent, involved membership going into the 2008-09 year.

Studying this group of college students provides an understanding of how supporting emerging adults through student programs can aid the transition between adolescence and adulthood as discussed by Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) and Arnett (2000). Colleges provide opportunities for youth/students to learn to use reason and evidence in problem solving, become less dependent on parents, and learn how they can affect the world around them (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Students that participated

in the study discussed the experiences that allowed them to exert their will in developing programs, while seeing those programs unfold added to their sense of competence.

This department's commitment to students also demonstrated the importance of college leadership and administration that recognize and support opportunities such as student leadership groups for developing skills that extend outside the classroom (Kuh, 1995, Astin, 1999 Kuh et.al, 2005). While the leadership group provided rich opportunities for these young people to support their burgeoning identities as leaders, it also provided a place for social negotiation, social capital, agency and volition. These are all skills and benefits that go a long way in adult work roles. These settings also provide opportunities for faculty to advise students in their future academic and career paths, elements essential to an effective learning environment (Astin, 1984).

Vowell (2007) discussed the importance of encouraging faculty-student interaction which has demonstrated "a strong correlation with increased intellectual and personal development, higher academic aspirations, and higher motivation, more positive attitudes towards college, and general cognitive development" (p. 319). The formation of these types of relationships with their professors was one of the main benefits that members expressed about their participation in the group. Students have been found to achieve greater success when they developed relationships of trust with faculty and advisors (Habley & Bloom, 2007). These relationships develop a bond and an appreciation for values which are reinforced in situations where relatedness or connectedness to others is prevalent (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students that joined the leadership group sought to develop relationships with their professors, their fellow

students and professionals in the field. These relationships were realized and cited as being beneficial to much of the work that occurred within the group.

Much growth within the group was attributed to the decision to allow students to lead the group. Advisors-led experiences took autonomy supportive roles and this added to the success of the group. Advisors making the effort to allow students to “run the show” while serving as resources is very much in line with developmental needs for volition and control for emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). These advisors, when asked, would use scaffolding techniques to move the students to do their own problem solving and make their decisions (Larson 2000; Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005). This action by the advisors, “finding a middle ground between being too directive and too laissez faire” would help to support the development of initiative as discussed by Larson (2000).

As students discussed, there were similar student leadership groups for other departments in the college, but students reported learning that their counterparts were often constrained and controlled by the department head and faculty of these departments. Too much direction from adults can thwart or discourage growth in young people (Larson, Hansen & Walker, 2005). Youth-led groups can have internal problems, as this student leadership group had its own share of problems, but they were allowed to negotiate and learn from the challenges presented by these problems. These experiences served as a chance for renewal and an opportunity to make things better. Students were determined to see things through, and this may have emerged from their early experiences with having control and feeling competent enough to improve their performances.

Members, who were in the organization for more than one year, showed signs of more internalized regulation in their motivation to be in the group. These individuals made adjustments to other factors in their lives to ensure that they were available to give their greatest effort and time to the student leadership group and the departmental needs (Astin, 1999). In interviews, members discussed their plans for the future of the student leadership group and how the following years would be; members were strongly committed to the purpose of the group in developing opportunities for other students and the department as a whole. These descriptions would suggest that performing and doing what was necessary to make the leadership group successful were internalized actions—they were able to ascribe personal relevance to extrinsically motivated action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students who made the decision to join the student leadership program and continue their membership were also demonstrating their dedication and commitment to the department as they reported spending a great portion of their free time away from studying and leisure pursuits, so that they could work towards making an impact on the lives of their fellow students and department. As one member stated, the students who made the decision to join the leadership group were taking a step up the ladder from other students to make a difference (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This is an internalized value that was developed through the experience of the student leadership group.

All members joining the student leadership group reported gaining skills and knowledge that they believed to be very beneficial to them as they work towards their academic and career paths (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003). They also

had personal goals that they set when they started the year. Most students stated that their goals were achieved, despite facing extreme challenge at time. Learning to persevere through challenge over time is a hallmark of initiative development (Larson 2000). However, several new members did feel that their goal for leadership development was not achieved due to the controlling leadership style they encountered, a factor that should be noted. Control undermines one sense of self-determination, and can be a big reason why much of the group reported being out of touch and apathetic to the leadership style of the president in year 2007-08.

Group members who participated under Diane's leadership discussed growing in confidence and feeling valuable in their contributions to the group. This is in contrast to those experiences of new members from the 2007-08 year. Diane's actions can be correlated with literature on charismatic leadership (Shamir, House & Arthur, 1993). Her interactions with group members, specifically feedback on projects and providing advice, demonstrated a confidence in herself. She also made members feel as though the smallest task was worthy of great praise and gratitude as it lead to a greater purpose. This feedback style was consistent with what Ryan and Deci (2000) identify as supporting people's basic needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence. Her commitment to them as a person and organization helped them to flourish as a group and provided them with a role model. Her abilities as an effective leader were seen in the group's performance and satisfaction as demonstrated during interviews with members and advisors. Having effective student leadership was a necessary component to the

successes experienced by this group, and is an idea that other student-led groups need to consider when developing.

Another important idea for advisors and leaders of these student groups is the role of fellow members or peers in these groups. Proximal processes within microsystems can positively or negatively affect an individual's progress in personal development when they are exposed to them on a regular basis over a period of time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Generative proximal processes are those that lead to positive development. In the case of this study, we were concerned with observing intrinsic motivation and initiative. This study also points to the disruptive proximal processes occurring within the microsystem, and demonstrate how one can become disengaged and removed from these programs. When group members were seen as supportive of each other, it fed their ability to stay focused on tasks and reinforced an internalized set of values that group members adopted. Student leadership is important to developing these groups and also understanding how members can support each other through difficult times.

This study setting provided an opportunity to observe emerging adults participating in a supportive college setting as they developed initiative as discussed by Larson (2000) and learned to internalize values and behaviors that will likely lead them to success in professional life. The study represents a glimpse at an intentional opportunity to develop and engage students in an effective learning environment and demonstrates how connected learning centers can facilitate change within students and organizations (Kuh, et. al 2005; Tinto, 1997). While this study extends what is known

about how these programs aid emerging adults, it also has many practical implications from which to consider developing similar programs.

Practical Implications of the Study

As indicated by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), and Kuh and his associates (2005), colleges and universities must strive to create effective educational settings on their campuses to ensure success of their institutions and their students. To achieve this, universities must look to their missions in developing policies for student governance, student organizations, programs, and activities. Students must perceive an environment of support in their growth, both in knowledge and personal development. This study supports these ideas as it shed some light on what is necessary to create and maintain a successful, meaningful student organization within a college or university setting.

Colleges must encourage their department administrators to encourage and support faculty to develop opportunities in their course curricula for students to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to activities outside the classroom. These opportunities can take place through department sponsored student activities that serve the relational needs of other students or through service activities in their surrounding communities. These activities can be created through student group projects where professors provide some structure to achieve the desired outcome but allow their students the autonomy to decide how outcomes will be achieved. These projects must incorporate classroom knowledge and classroom debriefings afterwards to discuss means for enhancing their efforts to create greater gains or benefits. Through connecting these

experiences with classes, students will achieve a greater understanding of the “why” behind their course assignments.

Department administrators should also work with other administrators, faculty and students to create organizations within their departments that offer activities that support the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to promote the development of motivation in young people or emerging adults as they prepare for their journey into a state of greater personal responsibility. Initiative development can also be developed within the same context when the organization has purpose and goals set that will take both individual and collective cooperation to be achieved. Most importantly, all organizations must be purposeful and mission driven to succeed. This study demonstrated the importance of departmental administration, faculty, and staff to be in agreement and accord to support their students’ success. These relationships were vital to the success of the student program under study. That stated, I learned that the most important relationship established at the university was between the group members and advisors for this student group.

Advisors need to gain trust from the members of the organizations they advise, this can be established through open and honest communication with positive feedback. Advisors appointed to provide support for these organizations can lay a foundation of success in the actions that they take at the beginning. For leadership groups or the leaders of larger organizations advisors should educate these students on group dynamics and expectations. Ideally the group executive committee should be trained to provide this same training to new members or could choose to request the advisor provided this

training. Advisors should also work with students to identify other professionals within their field of study who can provide these training and developmental opportunities.

Advisors play a key role in orienting student leaders and ensuring that these leaders are prepared and understand how to maintain individual interest and an engagement in these types of college programs. Advisors should also be willing to participate in programs that allow for their growth as leaders as well.

Student leaders or officers should also be well aware of the organizational mission and how it corresponds to college and departmental missions as well. This will serve to provide students an opportunity to understand how their organization is part of a larger purpose. Through this understanding, organization will be more purposeful in determining their organizational needs in the selection process of new members. Student leaders must remember that they are liaisons between their fellow students and the department administration and faculty, and therefore should also establish an open line of communication with their fellow students especially if students have concerns. Student leaders have the ability to set the tone among their fellow students and need to be supported by the department as a whole.

“All organizations are as successful as their weakest link” were the words of wisdom provided to the student leadership group members of year four. Their advisor was trying to help them understand that if one member fails, the group fails. New members bring unique qualities and skills when they join, each member can make or break an organization. A cooperative organization is one that is able to work together

utilizing a diversity of ideas, skills, values, and qualities that will intended goals and lead to success. This was observed to some extent through this study.

Limitations

The researcher was unable to interview all members of the organization, especially those who left the organization either of their own volition or otherwise. The members interviewed were those who stood through the test of time. These were the members who made it to the end, who reached their goals, who felt successful and had gained from the experience. Those who quit or failed to maintain required standard were not available to discuss if and how their development may have been disrupted by the organization, advisors or its members. Interviews with students outside the organization would have beneficial for comparison. It would have also been beneficial to interview the department head, faculty and staff to get their view of the members within the student leadership organization. In the interest of time, not all of this year's members were given exit interviews. When final interviews were scheduled the group had already had their last meeting. Even holding a focus group was not feasible. A longitudinal study following the new cohort another year would have added to the study. It would be interesting to see how negative experiences contributed to growth and change within the student leadership group during the 2008-09 year.

Implications for Future Studies

To establish a better picture on the role of student leadership programs, future research should compare representative student leadership organizations with other similar groups or organizations in other university departments. It would also be

beneficial observe other students outside of the department and similar student organizations to see if they are able to form the same type of relationships with other students, staff and faculty. This would enable us to see what works and does work in different settings, and this would provide even greater depth into the current best practices literature for this population. While there is research in the area of academic advising, research on student organizations is still limited and much is needed to understand the developmental processes at work and how these affect associated outcomes. On a college campus, it is vital that staff, faculty and administration understand their ability to help or hinder student success. We must continue study the 'how' of positive development and the 'what' we can do to make a positive difference in the lives of college students and emerging adults.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questions for Aggie REPS

1. How did you first hear about Aggie REPS? Why did it interest you?

Follow up questions if needed...

Who

Where

When

Did you know others applying?

First thoughts...

2. What was the application procedure like for you?

How long before you knew you had been accepted?

When you were selected... what were your first thoughts and actions?

3. What has your experience with Aggie REPS been in ...

Year One

Year Two

Year Three

Follow up if needed...

Perspective of self as Aggie REPS

Perspective of others as Aggie REPS

Perspective of your advisors

Perspective of RPTS staff support

Perspective of other RPTS faculty

Perspective of campus support / college support

4. What is the making of a good RPTS Aggie REP?

What skills do they need to have?

What characteristics should be displayed?

What qualities are sought?

5. If needed... do you see motivation playing a part in success or failure of a project?

Do you see initiative playing a part in success or failure of a project?

6. Do you have any other comments or insights about Aggie REPS that you would like to share with me?

Demographic information to be gathered will include: gender, age, race, class, hometown, parents' education & occupation, sibling(s)' educational levels and any previous experience in youth leadership programs.

VITA

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