

THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF OCCUPYING A HIGH SCHOOL POSITION OF  
LEADERSHIP AND COLLEGIATE INVOLVEMENT

BY

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THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

We examined the effect of occupying a high school position of leadership on collegiate involvement. Our goal was to better understand the extent to which possessing a position of leadership in high school affected the number of hours students spend in student college organizations, the number of organizations students participated in college, and the number of semesters for which students are involved in college. The study investigated members of registered student organizations (n=758) during the Fall 2016 semester. Within this single-campus study, findings suggest the vast majority of student active in collegiate organizations occupied a position of leadership while in high school and has a significant effect in determining collegiate involvement. Occupying leadership positions in high school were predictive of collegiate involvement only in the number of organizations students participated in college and number of semesters for which students were involved.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Obtaining a college degree has surpassed the high school degree as a marker for achievement, and many people perceive graduating college as an ideal path towards economic stability, self-sufficiency, and career development. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, in 2016 over 91% of the US population reported having a high school degree, but only about 36% reported having a Bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2016). However, the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce estimates that by 2020 65% of job openings will require postsecondary education beyond high school (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Many companies will not fill their job openings if graduation rates trends continue.

However, companies are not only looking for anyone with a degree to fill their job openings. Companies are highly selective when hiring candidates for a job. Employers are looking for candidates with vast experiences that go beyond the classroom that demonstrate knowledge and skills. While previous jobs and internships are familiar avenues for gaining experience, extracurricular activities in high school and college can also provide this. Extracurricular activities are factions in which many students are involved, whether it be sports, theatre, or student organizations. Students who are involved in high school and college often benefit from performing better academically (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Everson & Millsap, 2005; Holland & Andre, 1987; Lamborn, Brown, Mounts, & Steinberg, 1992; Massoni, 2011), increased likelihood of graduating high school (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Massoni, 2011; McNeal 1995) and higher wages in careers (Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005; Lamborn et al., 1992). However, occupying a position of leadership in high school can increase the likelihood and degree of these benefits.

This study is examining the effect of occupying a high school position of leadership has on collegiate involvement. It is essential to understand how holding positions of leadership affect collegiate involvement in part because there is a lack of support for students transitioning from high school to college to stay involved (Bruce & Stephens, 2017). If possessing a leadership position in high school does affect collegiate involvement, then parents, high school administrators, and collegiate institutions need to focus on practices and systems to help get their students involved earlier and help them transition into college to participate in registered student organizations (RSO).

## **CHAPTER: 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Before understanding how occupying leadership positions in high school affect collegiate involvement, it is important to review how involvement in high school and college is beneficial. Research shows that high school students who participate in extracurricular activities benefit in academic performance (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles et al., 2003; Everson & Millsap, 2005; Holland & Andre, 1987; Lamborn et al., 1992; Massoni, 2011), increased likelihood of graduating high school (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Massoni, 2011; McNeal 1995) and higher wages in careers (Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005; Lamborn et al., 1992).

Being involved in extracurricular activities in college also has many benefits when compared to those who are not involved. These benefits may include higher levels of psychosocial development (Foubert & Grainger, 2006), psychological well-being (Bowman, 2010), critical thinking (Gellin, 2003), greater chances at making middle management and improved interpersonal skills (Howard, 1986), and serve as a valuable experience more related to the real world (Kuh, 1995).

Extracurricular activities can result in the positive outcomes outlined in this review of literature, and bring other positive characteristics out of the students who participate in them. The themes addressed in this review of literature focus on the effects of extracurricular activities on students' cognitive and physical abilities, developmental experiences, psychological and psychosocial impacts. I will also be exploring the differences of these effects through gender.

### **Effects of Involvement in Secondary Education**

#### *Academic Performance*

One might assume any activities that take away from a student's time, energy, and opportunity to study or learn course material will have negative effects on their academic

performance, such as grades and test scores. However, multiple studies have indicated that most extracurricular activities often have positive effects on students' school performance (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles et al., 2003; Everson & Millsap, 2005; Holland & Andre, 1987; Lamborn et al., 1992; Massoni, 2011). According to Eccles and Barber (1999), involvement in prosocial activities, sports teams, performing arts, academic clubs, or had high levels of school involvement all predicted a higher high school GPA than those who did not. Lamborn et al. (1992) found a positive correlation between the hours students spent on extracurricular activities and the amount of academic effort and achievement. It seems that extracurricular activities promote an aptitude to perform better in school. One possible explanation may be that students fear suspension from the activity due to poor grades.

#### *Likelihood of Dropping Out*

Academic performance is one of the strongest predictors of students who drop out of high school (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). If extracurricular activities positively affect academic performance, it is reasonable then to deduce that extracurricular activities correlate to fewer students dropping out of high school. Multiple studies conclude that students involved in extracurricular activities were less likely to drop out of high school and more probable to go to college (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles et al., 2003; Lamborn et al., 1992). Part of the reason students are more likely to go to college if they are involved is due to their increased GPA. Students involved in extracurricular activities also tended to do better when it came to college admission test scores (Everson & Millsap, 2005). Everson and Millsap (2005) found that students who participated in extracurricular activities produced an average of a 45-point increase in math scores, and a 53-point increase in verbal scores than their peers who did not participate. In comparison, the researchers found for every \$20,000 increase in family income there was only

a 16-point increase in math and verbal scores. A study done by Mahoney & Cairns (1997) found that athletics had the most significant impact at deterring students from dropping out and attending college. The results from that study also showed that the more activities students participated in a stronger deterrent of dropping out. However, one study by McNeal (1995) resulted in only athletic participation being a significant deterrent to dropping out of high school. It is evident that extracurricular activities act as a deterrent for students from dropping out, but researchers should continue to strive to understand what activities have a more significant impact. However, it may be that students who stay in school and are on the path to college have a greater chance of being involved in extracurricular activities and holding prominent positions in them.

#### *Impact of Holding a Leadership Position*

The impact of just being involved in extracurricular activities is significant, but holding leadership positions has an even more significant impact. Students who hold leadership positions in their extracurricular activities often obtain added benefits than those who are only members or just attending meetings (Kuhn & Weinberger., 2005; Lamborn et al., 1992). There is increased attention by institutions for students with high school leadership positions when deliberating who will be admitted (Morse, 2001). Having a leadership position in high school may also be a predictor of earning higher wages after college (Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005). Kuhn and Weinberger (2005) state “...we found that individuals who exhibited leadership propensities in high school earn significantly more about ten years later.” These findings were consistent across three different cohorts of students at least eight years apart, with the largest gap being twenty years apart. Kuhn and Weinberger (2005) also found that students who held a position of both sports team captain and club presidents earn 6.9% more than those who did not



hold a leadership position in those activities do. The researchers also found that 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students with an inclination to lead and attended a school where at least 25% of older students are heavily involved in leadership activities earn almost 10% more as adults, compared to those who attend schools where only 15% of the older students are involved. However, Kuhn and Weinberger's (2005) population only consisted of white men, so researchers should focus on how leadership positions in high school affect other genders, ethnicities, and races. The importance of holding leadership positions in high school will likely grow as more people are graduating high school than ever before (ACHA-NCHA II, 2017) and colleges become more selective in their admissions process.

### *Risky Behavior*

Participation in high school extracurricular activities has a significant impact in deterring the likelihood that students will not engage in risky and problem behaviors, except for athletics (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles et al., 2003). Involvement in prosocial activities seems to be the biggest deterrent to risky behaviors. Students in a prosocial activity reported lower rates of drinking alcohol, getting drunk, skipping school, using marijuana and hard drugs (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Participating in a prosocial activity in high school also results as a long-term deterrent to risky behavior. Students who were involved in a prosocial activity in high school also reported lower rates of using of drugs and alcohol, getting drunk, driving while impaired or riding with someone who is alcohol-impaired at the ages of 21-22 and 25-26 (Eccles et al., 2003). However, in both studies by Eccles and Barber (1999) and Eccles et al. (2003), they found that students participating in sports were more likely to drink alcohol and get drunk than those that did not participate in sports. While participating in athletics does seem to encourage more risky behavior in students, it still has many positive effects.

## **Effects of Involvement in Post-Secondary Education**

As discussed earlier in this review of literature, being involved in high school extracurricular activities results in a greater chance of attending college and may allow them to be more selective of the institutions. Few high school students only look at academic prestige when choosing the college they wish to attend. While academic prestige plays a major factor, many teenagers look beyond this and more at the experience they will potentially receive. Once in college, many students will elect to join an organization, such as Greek organizations, academic clubs, service groups, and student government. These organizations provide a different type of education that gives students an opportunity to apply classroom concepts to a real-world environment (Kuh, 1995). There are numerous other benefits to students who join organizations in college, such as increased critical thinking (Gellin, 2003), higher psychosocial development (Foubert & Grainger, 2006), and a greater predictor of making middle management (Howard, 1986).

### *Academic Performance*

A study conducted found that pre-college characteristics, such as ACT or SAT scores, are a predictor of first-year grades for college students, but diminish considerably as the year continues (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). However, the same study found that student engagement positively affects the academic performance of students in college in both their first and last year. Therefore, while the actions and activities a student participates in high school may affect their chances of going to college and earning grades their first year, the effects of being involved and engaged in college are greater predictors as their post-secondary education continues. Kuh (2008) also states that students who complement their education with other initiatives (activities) are more satisfied in college and more likely to graduate. Astin (1999) also

found in his study of over 200,000 students that the more involved a student is in college, the greater the student will learn and develop personally. One may be able to attribute increased grades for more involved students to have the opportunity to practice their coursework in a more realistic setting, such as student government. Less involved students may not have an opportunity to apply course concepts in any way and thus may not think about these concepts until their next class.

### *Psychological Well-Being*

In 2016, roughly 30% of college-aged students reported being treated by a professional for a mental health condition (ACHA-NCHA II, 2017). The amount of college students who have a mental health issue is staggering, and Universities should take steps to combat it. A study by Bowman (2010) found that time spent in extracurricular activities positively affects personal growth, positive relationships, and purpose in life, which all affect a person's psychological well-being. Extracurricular activities in this study positively relate to all dimensions of Psychological well-being except for autonomy.

### *Psychosocial Development*

Students in college student organizations have shown strong correlations to higher levels of psychosocial development than those who were not involved at all (Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Kuh, 1995; Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway & Lovell, 1999; Gellin, 2003; Howard, 1986). Psychosocial development refers to variables such as developing mature interpersonal relationships, career planning, lifestyle planning and management, cultural participation, academic autonomy, clarifying purpose, and other attributes related to what one could consider "being an adult."

Foubert and Grainger (2006) found in their longitudinal study of college sophomores through their senior year, students involved in organizations (attending a meeting, joining, or leading the organization) were more developed in the areas above of psychosocial development than students not involved. The skills were even more highly developed in students who were actual members or leaders of the organization rather than just attending a meeting. The researchers also found that students involved in organizations had a significantly higher level of development in clarifying purpose, educational involvement, career planning, lifestyle management, and culture participation than they did at the beginning of their sophomore year. Foubert and Grainger (2006) stated it plainly, “there appears to be a strong connection between involvement in student organizations and higher levels of development on several indicators of psychosocial development (175).”

Student involvement also plays a large role in the development of critical thinking (Gellin, 2003), something that many universities try to foster and develop. As stated before, the extracurricular activities that students participate usually serve as a place to further develop the skills and concepts taught in the classroom. Gellin (2003) hypothesizes from his findings that students likely relate the connection between extracurricular activities to their academics, and develop a renewed appreciation for in-class activities. Therefore, while classroom concepts may set the foundation for students to use that knowledge in extracurricular activities, they, in turn, direct their new experiences back into the classroom.

### *Middle Management*

Extracurricular activities have many positive effects for students while they are in college. However, the reason for going to college is to set up success for a job afterwards. Therefore, it is important to look at the relationship between extracurricular activities and post-

college success. One study, which looks at the relationship between college experiences and management potential finds positive correlations between the two (Howard, 1986). Howard (1986) found that simply attending college is a higher predictor of making middle management than not going to college. However, there was no correlation to participation in extracurricular activities or leadership positions to advancement past middle management.

### *Implications*

Students who participate in extracurricular activities tend to develop higher and more rapidly in areas that companies desire (soft skills) than those who do not participate at all (Howard, 1986; Gellin, 2003; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Hernandez et al., 1999). These findings have important implications for colleges wishing to develop more successful students and companies trying to hire the best talent. Colleges, specifically student affair departments, should be exploring more ways to encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities and invest time and energy into those activities. Universities who care about their reputation and prestige should be investing time and resources in student organizations in an effort to develop successful students. Companies looking to hire the best talent need to consider more strongly the amount of involvement their candidates had in college. Critical thinking, leadership abilities, and ability to work in teams are often in job requirements, which are skills that extracurricular activities have shown to develop more. Students looking to land jobs that are more favorable also need to consider the type and amount of organizations they join to develop these skills and appeal to companies.

### **Gender Differences in Involvement Patterns**

There are some significant differences in participation in extracurricular activities between males and females. Historically, males have dominated sports participation numbers in

high school and college, but with the passing of Title IX in 1972, the participation of females in sports has increased dramatically (Stevenson, 2010). However, a much larger percentage of males (66%) still participate in sports than females (46%) (McNeal, 1998). The discrepancy between the percentage of males and females participating in sports is larger than students from high socio-economic status versus low socio-economic status, race, GPA, 2-parent household versus single-parent household, and hours working a job (McNeal, 1998).

Although males are much more likely to participate in sports, females are more likely to participate in other extracurricular activities such as fine arts, academic organizations, newspaper/yearbook, and student service/government (McNeal, 1998; Eccles & Barber, 1999). Females were also more likely to be involved in multiple extracurricular activities than males (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Therefore, while females fall behind in rates of participation in sports, they begin to make up for it in other activities. However, the discrepancy of male and female participation in sports is still concerning considering that sports are the most participated activity in high school for males and females (Eccles & Barber, 1999), and usually the most prestigious among peers (McNeal, 1998).

### **Lack of Support for Transitioning Students**

There is a large amount of evidence described in this review of literature stating the benefits for students involved in extracurricular activities in both high school and college. However, there is a gap of support for students to continue developing the skills they learn in extracurricular activities when transitioning from high school to college (Bruce & Stephens, 2017). Other than athletes who go on to play sports in college, there are virtually no systems in place that provide a clear and structured transition for students in extracurricular activities. However, there are many systems in place, and rightfully so, to help a student transition

smoothly for academics. Students are often required to meet with advisors and plan every class they need to take to graduate. Free access to libraries, writing labs, and other facilities are readily available for all students. It is clear then that there is a gap for students in extracurricular activities who are transitioning into college that secondary and post-secondary educators need to bridge.

To help students transition into college, educators and community members need to begin building bridges for these students (Bruce & Stephens, 2017; Dugan & Komives, 2007). Bruce and Stephens (2017) state that finding outlets for students to participate is key, and they provide educators and adults (whom they refer to as “leadership learning facilitators (LLF)”) with some practical ways they can do this. The main way for LLFs to help transitioning students is to collaborate with secondary or post-secondary programs and advisors is to help identify specific organizations to be involved in, based on the students’ interests. Whether it be in service-based clubs, agricultural clubs, athletics, or student government the advisor or LLF should initiate the process of getting students involved. As it stands now, students are left to find the organizations they want to be a part of on their own (Bruce & Stephens, 2017), and often they do not initiate the process at all or fall short. Bruce and Stephens (2017) outline other ways for LLFs to help bridge the gap for transition students into college, but the most important action is helping students initiate the process and identify potential organizations to join. However, with the number of resources available, it may be unrealistic to reach every student in the current system.

My thesis is not investigating different steps or actions that could potentially help close the gap I describe. Instead, my thesis will examine if occupying a leadership position in high school is common predictors of collegiate involvement. By understanding the dynamic between occupying leadership positions in high school extracurricular activities and involvement in

college organizations we may be able to identify which students to target when helping mend the transition into college and finding the right places to get involved. LLFs could potentially target students with less experience in leadership positions who may need more help in the transitioning process to college and getting involved with an organization on campus than other students do.

## **Conclusion**

It is obvious that participation in extracurricular activities is beneficial for students in both secondary and post-secondary education, primarily in the development of soft skills. These benefits are often magnified when students are more involved in activities or hold leadership positions. Although there is a large amount of research supporting the positive effects of being involved, there are very few systems in place to help students transition from high school to college in extracurricular activities. Researchers need to explore more ways for educators and advisors to help the transition of students into college non-academically, and conduct research on which activities are most beneficial. Additionally, it is important to understand if leadership positions in high school affect the amount of time spent involved in college organizations to determine who needs help with the transition after graduation. The benefits of being involved in high school and college are too important for a student's development to ignore.

## **Research Design and Instruction**

This research study was designed to examine the effect of occupying a high school position of leadership. We addressed the following questions: To what extent does possessing a high school position of leadership affect the number of hours students spend in student college organizations, number of organizations participated in college, and number of semesters for which they are involved in college? To record our dependent variable for the total number of



hours spent in RSOs we asked the questions, “How many hours per week are you involved in this RSO?” and “Hours spent in other activities (current).” To determine the number of RSOs involved in we asked, “How many other RSOs are you involved in?” and added one to account for the RSO where they initially completed the survey. Finally, to determine the total number of semesters involved we asked, “For how many semesters have you been involved in RSOs in general?” We controlled for gender identity and class-year enrolled in college because past research shows that these variables are strongly correlated with our dependent variables. Then, we constructed a structural equation model to examine the degree to which our independent variable of possessing a high school position of leadership was associated with each of our three dependent variables.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Population and Sample

We, at The Illinois Leadership Laboratory, conducted research at a large, highly selective public university in the Midwestern United States during the Fall 2016 semester. During that semester, the university reported over 1,400 registered student organizations of varying interests. The researchers contacted many of the organizations at the suggestion of staff within the university who were responsible and oversaw formal student organizations. These organizations were, therefore, more likely to participate in the project due to a healthy relationship with the staff. This study originated in the university's college of agriculture, and, thus, we chose a smaller group of organizations associated with the college due to them being more likely to respond to the research invitation than organizations with no association. These groups were not representative of a random sample, but were still highly diverse regarding size, purpose, organizational structure, and longevity on campus. Organizations participating in the study included fraternities and sororities, dance organizations, topical interest groups, sport-focused clubs, A Capella groups, and profession-based organizations. While these organizations do not fully represent the broad diversity of registered student groups on university campuses, they do broadly range in membership, interest, focus, and shape of campus and community impact. We sent initial invitation emails to the president or presiding executive student of each group within the first month of the semester we conducted the study. In total, students within 38 formal student organizations completed the survey, where a mean percentage of completion was 75% within each organization.

The survey produced 758 respondents to the survey, of whom 67.7% identified as women (n=501), 32.2% as a man (n=238), and 0.1% as part of the trans\* (n=1) community. Of the

participants, 22.2% were freshman (n=168), 27.3% were sophomores (n=206), 21.9% were juniors (n=166), 21.4% were seniors (n=162), and 7.3% were graduate students (n=55). Regarding racial identity, 49.7% identified as white (n=370), 34.0% as Asian American (n=253), 6.0% as Latin (n=45), 2.2% as African American (n=19), 1.1% as Middle Eastern (n=8), and 6% identified as having more than one race or specifically as multiracial (n=43). The remaining .09% preferred not to identify their racial identity or did not respond (n=7). Table 1 shows the descriptive demographics of the population in our study.

Table 1  
*Demographics of Population*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
<b>Gender Identity</b>		
Women	501	67.7%
Men	238	32.2%
Trans	1	0.1%
<b>Racial Identity</b>		
White	370	49.7%
Asian American	253	34.0%
Latin	45	6.0%
African American	19	2.2%
Middle Eastern	8	1.1%
Multiracial	43	6.0%
Prefer not to answer	7	0.09%
<b>Class Year</b>		
Freshman	168	22.2%
Sophomore	206	27.3%
Junior	166	21.9%
Senior	162	21.4%
Grad	55	7.3%

### **Variables and Instrumentation**

The goal of this study was to determine the effects of occupying a high school position of leadership in determining the extent of student’s involvement in college. We created a questionnaire that included questions about students’ prior high school involvement and their

prior and current collegiate involvement. High school involvement was measured retrospectively, so we elected to limit our measurement to two general variables – the remembered priority that students placed on being involved in high school student organizations, and if students occupied a formal position of leadership. For this study, we only focused on the latter question regarding a formal position of leadership. Then, we asked three questions to determine the effect of high school leadership positions on collegiate involvement. We asked, “How many hours per week are you involved in this RSO?” and elicited a free response with no restrictions. We asked, “For how many semesters have you been involved in RSOs in general?” and participants could answer using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to more than 10. Finally, we asked, “How many other RSOs are you involved in?” and participants answered using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to more than 8.

### **Data Collection**

We collected the data at the organization’s meetings over the course of the Fall 2016 semester. Students completed a hard copy survey in the presence of a researcher. Students who were not in attendance at the meeting had the opportunity to complete the survey through an online Qualtrics survey portal. An incentive of 50% was awarded to organizations whose total membership participated at a rate of 75% or greater.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Table 2 shows the number of leadership positions students occupied in high school, on a scale from 1-7. Almost all of the participants (98.5%) surveyed reported possessing one or more leadership positions in high school and 94.7% reported possessing multiple leadership positions. Over one-third (70.8%) of participants reported possessing six or seven leadership positions in high school.

Table 2

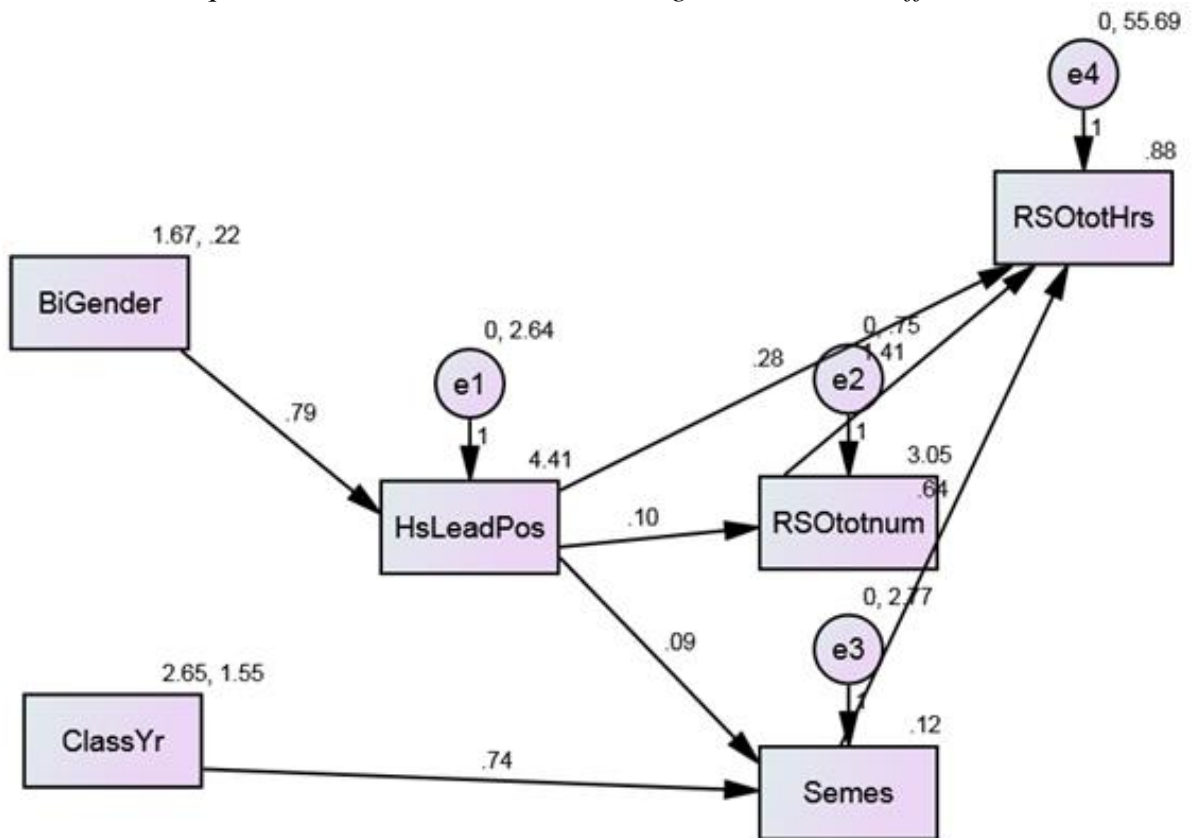
<i>Number of leadership positions students occupied in high school</i>		
<i>#</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
0	11	1.5%
1	29	3.8%
2	38	5.0%
3	26	3.4%
4	38	5.0%
5	87	11.5%
6	195	25.7%
7	334	44.1%
Total	747	100.0%

The structural equation model was designed to test the connections between high school leadership position and collegiate involvement. Multiple indices evaluated the quality of this hypothesized model. A root mean square errors of approximation (RMSEA) value  $<0.07$  indicates a good model fit (Schreiber et al., 2006). The model in this study yielded RMSEA=0.066, indicating that the model fits the observed data to an appropriate degree. The comparative fit index (CFI) should be large, ideally  $>0.90$  (Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, & Barlow, 2006). The model in this study produced a CFI=0.92. Lastly, CMIN/DF=4.060. These goodness-of-fit measures indicated a strong model fit supporting the hypothesized model as a good representation of the relationship between occupying a leadership position in high school and collegiate involvement.

Figure 1 represents the final structural equation model including the standardized regression coefficients for each relationship in the model. The structural equation model shows the strength of these relationships. The correlation between possessing a leadership position and high school and the total number of semesters involved in RSOs in college yielded a regression coefficient of 0.09 and was the weakest of the three variables. The total number of RSOs involved in yielded a 0.10 regression coefficient. Finally, the total number of hours spent in RSOs yielded a regression coefficient of 0.28, the strongest correlation between each variable tested.

An examination of the P-values associated with each of these regression coefficients indicates statistically significant relationships between high school leadership position and the total number of RSOs involved in college ( $P > 0.001$ ) as well as with the number of semesters of involvement ( $P = 0.02$ ). No statistical significance emerged between high school leadership position and the total number of hours dedicated to collegiate RSOs.

Figure 1  
*Final Structural Equation Model with Standardized Regression Path Coefficients*



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the vast majority of students active in collegiate organizations occupied a position of leadership while in high school, and has a significant effect in determining collegiate involvement.

In our research, we found that the total number of RSOs participated in and the number of semesters involved in RSOs were significantly affected by occupying a leadership position in high school. However, the significance of these findings were only moderate, suggesting there are other contributing factors that we did not account for in our research. Regardless, the importance of possessing a leadership position in high school should not be understated. We can also attribute the benefits of collegiate involvement to possessing a leadership position in high school due to the correlation we found in our research.

We did not find a statistical significance between possessing a high school leadership position and the total number of hours participated in RSOs. This also suggests there were more factors that contribute to the number of hours spent in RSOs that are more significant than possessing a leadership position in high school. This is surprising due to the high correlation between holding a position of leadership in high school and hours spent in RSOs. Other factors that may correlate to hours spent in RSOs might include the number of credits taken in a semester or possessing a job, which inherently takes time away from participating in organizations.

### **Implications**

Several implications result from the findings in this study. Our findings support Bruce and Stephens' (2017) claim that there needs to be a stronger system in place in bridging the gap for students between high school and college who want to get involved. Involved students have



added benefits than those who do not participate and both high school and collegiate institutions should be working towards helping the greatest number of students possible get involved in RSOs. Involvement in RSOs is positively correlated with academic performance (Kuh et al., 2008), psychological well-being (Bowman, 2010), psychosocial development (Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Kuh, 1995; Hernandez et al., 1999; Gellin, 2003; Howard, 1986), and possessing a job in middle management or higher (Howard, 1986). Knowing that possessing a leadership position has a higher chance of leading to the aforementioned benefits, it becomes critical in developing systems to help students achieve these positions.

These findings also have implications for different stakeholders. High school institutions should focus on providing many options for their students to get involved and give multiple opportunities to occupying a leadership position. These leadership opportunities should also be diverse to appeal to a wide array students. Not every student will have the opportunity to be the president or primary leader of an organization. Common positions in organizations may include treasurer, secretary, membership director, and recruitment director. Student positions can also include less conventional titles, such as the birthday or party chair. Administrators and teachers who oversee various student organizations work towards creating a title for as many students who wish to hold one. While this may not be feasible in larger organizations, it does increase the likelihood that more students in a school will hold a leadership position.

These findings also result in implications for collegiate institutions and officials. As stated earlier, there is a gap of support for students to continue developing the skills they learn in extracurricular activities when transitioning from high school to college (Bruce and Stephens, 2017). Just as there are systems in place to help transition students to college academically (access to writing labs, libraries, advisors, etc.) there should be a better system to transition

students interested in getting involved. There are some practices that many college institutions use to help students get involved, such as quad days (similar to a job fair for RSOs) and recommendations from advisors. However, quad days may offer too many RSOs at one time for any student to find which one is right for them, and advisors can only recommend the RSOs they know about. These findings also suggest that college advisors who already do help students get involved in RSOs should focus on students who have not held a high school leadership position. Since students who have occupied leadership positions in high school are more likely to get involved, advisors should focus on those less likely to participate.

We stated earlier that there are other factors that likely contribute to collegiate involvement. These findings could benefit those who have not held any leadership positions in high school and for advisors. Students who did not hold leadership positions in high school may be affected by other factors that also correlate to high levels of collegiate involvement, providing them with similar benefits of those who did hold positions. In addition, advisors should take comfort in knowing that they can positively influence students to get involved in student organizations because it is not solely reliant on a predetermined position. If the statistical significance in our study were higher, there would be less of a need for advisors who have responsibilities of helping students get involved on campus.

Secondary and post-secondary institutions should be encouraged to take steps in leading students towards occupying a position of leadership in high school. Students should be given many opportunities to possess a leadership role, even if the titles are unique and hold less important responsibilities. This may lead to more students occupying leadership positions in high school, and thus, becoming more involved in collegiate organizations.

## **Limitations**

While our findings show that occupying a high school leadership position is significant in determining collegiate involvement, there are limitations to this study. The vast majority of our population (98.5%) reported possessing more than one position of leadership in high school, leaving us with a very small number (n=11) of students who had not occupied a leadership position. The lack of students who had not possessed a leadership position in high school made determining statistical relationships difficult in our study. We also did not include any students who were no longer involved in any organization, as all participants in our study were a part of at least one college student organization.

Our study also had participants answering questions about high school retroactively, which may cause them to misremember if they truly possessed a leadership position. Results might look different if this study was longitudinal, beginning with the participants in high school. While our participants came from many different high schools and backgrounds, presumably around the country and world, the entire population attended only one collegiate institution. The findings may be different in smaller or geographically different collegiate institutions.

### **Future Research**

There is surprisingly little research done that closely relates to our research design and question. Researchers should continue to conduct studies that determine the degree to which occupying a leadership position in high school affects collegiate involvement. Future researchers should strive to include a larger population of students who never held a position of leadership in high school. Researchers should also strive to include a population of students who are not currently involved in any collegiate organizations at the time of the study. A longitudinal study, which includes many different institutions, would be ideal for this research.

### **Conclusion**

This study was conducted to examine the effect that occupying a high school position of leadership affects the number of hours students spend in student college organizations, the number of organizations participated in college, and the number of semesters for which they are involved in college. Within this single-campus study, findings suggest the vast majority of students active in collegiate organizations occupied a position of leadership while in high school and has a significant effect in determining collegiate involvement. Occupying leadership positions in high school were predictive of collegiate involvement only in the number of organizations participated in college and semesters for which students were involved. While we suggest that researchers continue to conduct studies related to our research, these findings provide initial evidence that possessing a leadership position in high school provides a common pathway of more involvement in college student organizations.

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