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Zhang, Jie; LeSavoy, Barbara; Lieberman, Lauren J.; and Barrett, Leah, "Faculty Learning Community (FLC) on Student Leadership: Applying Student Voices to Leadership Development" (2014). *Education and Human Development Faculty Publications*. 10.
https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_facpub/10

Citation/Publisher Attribution:

Mountain Rise: the International Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 8(2), 1-18. DOI : <http://dx.doi.org/10.1234/mrv8i2.250>.

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Faculty Learning Community (FLC) on Student Leadership:

Applying Student Voices to Leadership Development

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Abstract

While college student leadership is well studied, the faculty's role in developing student leaders is an area that is underexplored. Twenty students joined eleven members of a faculty learning community (FLC) in a mid-sized college to discuss their perspectives on student leadership. The FLC members/researchers used semi-structured focus group interviews and a phenomenological approach to identify traits of student leaders and to explore opportunities colleges can offer to promote students' growth as leaders. Using thematic analysis, this study discusses the ways colleges can use FLCs as a platform to facilitate student leadership effectively.

Key words: Faculty learning community, college student, perspectives, leadership

Introduction

College student leadership education is traditionally an initiative championed by student affairs professionals in higher education, who facilitate workshops, train resident assistants and student employees, host community service experiences, teach leadership studies courses and provide internship opportunities. The role of a faculty learning community in developing student leaders is an underexplored area. This study, conducted by the Student Leadership Faculty Learning Community (FLC) in a mid-sized state university, was designed to identify qualities of student leaders using an FLC paradigm to explore opportunities colleges can offer to promote student growth as leaders. The researchers, also members of this Student Leadership FLC, describe the process and outcomes of using an FLC as a platform to provide faculty and students across disciplines opportunities to engage in dialogue on student leadership on campus. Drawing on intersections within FLC and student leadership theory (Desrochers, 2010; Beach & Cook, 2009), the researchers asked: In what ways can the use of the FLC model impact faculty participants' perspectives, attitudes, and actions regarding their roles in cultivating college student leadership development? This research question serves as a framework for the study where the authors tease out ways an FLC captured important leadership characteristics in developing student leaders. This article concludes with best practices recommendations, illustrating strategies colleges can deploy in using an FLC model to facilitate student leadership growth.

Faculty Learning Community (FLC)

In a faculty learning community (FLC), six to fifteen faculty and professional staff across different disciplines build a genuine community, make a year-long commitment, and engage in active and collaborative professional development conceived as learning (Cox, 2004; Shulman, 1993; Ortquist-Ahrens & Torosyan, 2009). Cox (2001) identifies ten qualities as essential to the success of FLCs: "safety and trust, openness, respect, responsiveness, collaboration, relevance, challenge, enjoyment, esprit de corps, and empowerment" (p. 18-19). Through frequent activities and careful reflections, an FLC provides safety and support for its members to investigate, attempt, assess, and adopt new (to them) methods (Cox, 2004); promotes "collegial, interpersonal, and collaborative relationships" (Ortquist-Ahrens & Torosyan, 2009, p. 3); and supports teaching and learning (Cox, 2004). Importantly, an FLC

creates the deep learning opportunities for its members, which often results in student learning and feedback (Cox, 2004).

Current but limited research into the effects of FLCs on student leadership suggests that the use of small group learning environments has a positive impact on learning (Desrochers, 2010). The benefits compared with other forms of faculty development include a more focused, intensive, and structured effort with the topic, attention paid to building community while working on a shared project or topic, and a positive impact on improved implementation of pedagogical techniques and assessment of student learning in classes that are taught by those involved in the FLC (Desrochers, 2010; Beach & Cook, 2009). FLC research also suggests that a key benefit of an FLC is that its members come from diverse backgrounds with a variety of experience (Gebelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990).

College Student Leadership Development

College student leadership is demonstrated by making positive impacts at any level of an organization by applying sound ethical principles, ensuring that all voices are heard in decisions, and encouraging others to act (Komives, et al., 2011; HERI, 1996). The FLC utilized this student leadership thinking as a foundation to inform its study where it conceptualized leadership in a broad context, theorizing it as fluid and evolving. By design, FLC members employed this open and variable lens in the FLC study so readers have the opportunity to understand leadership in multiple ways and with flexibility.

College student leadership development programs are informed by work of scholars and practitioners who recognize that all students have the capacity to demonstrate leadership and that these skills will help students make the world a better place. Common guiding principles of these programs are: all students have the capacity to demonstrate leadership (Komives, et al., 2011), leadership development is a process that leads to positive social change (HERI, 1996), and a combination of intentional faculty/staff interventions provides the appropriate levels of challenge and support to create the development of college students (Moore & Upcraft, 1990). For purposes of this discussion, and as an intersection to our FLC student leadership work, we examine three leadership principles: student engagement, mentor relationships, and internships/field experiences.

Student leadership development theory has received increased attention in recent years as colleges and universities recognize the importance of ensuring that their graduates apply ethical

standards within their chosen profession, make a positive impact as engaged community citizens, and stay connected to the institution after graduation (Astin, 1993; Komives, et al., 2011; Kuh, et al., 2010). Research has focused on college student engagement in relation to educational outcomes and student leadership development (Kuh, et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

Mentoring is one of the activities higher education institutions provide that has significant impact on the development of student leadership skills (Dugan, et al., 2011). Roberts (2000) points out that college and university faculty, staff, senior/graduate students, peers, friends, religious leaders, and/or family can all serve as mentors. This FLC study adopted the broader concept of mentorship, including student-faculty and student-student. The skills and knowledge that students gain from mentoring include public speaking, building confidence, working effectively on teams and in groups, serving the community, becoming civically engaged, and influencing positive change (Dugan, et al., 2011; Komives, et al., 2011; Kuh, et al., 2010).

Student internships are another experience that may promote college student leadership development. Working in the field, taking action in the community, and learning from more experienced mentors allow students to discover what they do/do not know and what does/does not work, which, in turn, better trains them for more complicated roles, including leadership (Williams, Matthews, & Baugh, 2004). Internships also are a means for students to explore different career fields and enact a chosen academic major. The internship experience is impactful and shown to build leadership capacity among college students through the exploration and submersion in an experience that is very different than what students experience in the classroom (Dugan, et al., 2011).

Individual faculty and staff play a critical role in encouraging students to become engaged in the campus community and to provide leadership opportunities that will help students grow. Placing the FLC into a research context, this study provides an inside look at college students' perspectives on leadership, and in turn, provides faculty/staff insight into FLC development opportunities which encourage student success.

Methodology

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to describe and reflect college students' perspectives and expectations on leadership engagement (van Manen, 1997; Moustakas,

1994). The phenomenological approach created a comparative lens that allowed the researchers to analyze students' lived experiences before and during college and compare commonalities among the participants. This research method facilitated the listening, seeing, and responses between participants necessary to understand the realities of college students and leadership.

Participants

This Student Leadership FLC was composed of eleven college professors, representing departments across campus which included Business Administration and Economics, Education and Human Development, Women and Gender Studies, Theater, Mathematics, Recreation and Leisure Studies, Kinesiology, Sport Studies, and Physical Education, and staff in Military Science and Student Affairs.

The researchers used an opportunistic sampling strategy, drawing student participants from a pool recommended by professors who served in the Student Leadership FLC (Creswell, 2006). After the college Internal Review Board (IRB) approved the research study, the researchers emailed a letter of invitation to each selected student. Students confirmed their interest in participating in the research by completing signed consent forms that the researchers provided. The researchers invited 24 students to share their stories related to student leadership. Twenty of the 24 students (83%) participated in a student focus group. These participants consisted of six males (30%) and 14 females (70%); comprised of 19 white (95%) and one Hispanic (5%) student. The college's student demographic includes: males (42.3%), females (57.7%); white (78.5%), Hispanic (3.9%), black or African American (6.9%), Asian, native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (1.8%), American Indian or Alaska Native (0.6%), and unidentified race/ ethnicity (8.3%). Table 1 details demographics of each student, including an overview of identity variables related to students' leadership experiences.

Data Collection

The semi-structured focus group interviews with the FLC members and their recommended student participants served as primary data of the study. The FLC researchers used open-ended questions to increase the breadth of responses (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The researchers audio-taped the interviews with students and transcribed these audiotapes verbatim. Interview questions included:

- a) When was the first time you recognized that you were a leader?

- b) What opportunity did you find here in college that allowed you to be a better leader?
- c) What are the traits of good leadership that you suggest professors should look for in future leaders?
- d) Is there any advice you'd like to give to professors and the college to facilitate your growth as a leader?

TABLE 1
Demographic Information of Participants

Student	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Major(s)/ Minor	Undergraduate/ Graduate	Year(s) in school
Debera	F	Caucasian	27	Undeclared	G	
Robert	M	Caucasian	21	Psychology/Sociology	U (Senior)	3.5
Ed	M	Caucasian	26	Mathematic/Childhood inclusive education	U (Senior)	2.5
Dan	M	Caucasian	27	Finance	U (Senior)	1
Carole	F	Caucasian	21	1. Political Science/ Philosophy & Women and Gender Studies 2. International Studies (Delta College)	U (Senior)	3.5
Danielle	F	Caucasian	23	Women and Gender Studies	U (Senior)	.5
Brittany	F	Caucasian	21	History and Women and Gender Studies	U (Senior)	3.75
Tom	M	Caucasian	21	Mathematics/Adolescence inclusive education	U (Senior)	3.5
Alice	F	Caucasian	19	Spanish/Military science	U (Junior)	1.5
Chloe	F	Caucasian	23	Nursing	U (Senior)	2.5
Jay	M	Caucasian	22	Physical Education (with adapted PE concentration)	G	1.5
Tiffany	F	Caucasian	22	Physical Education (with adapted PE concentration)/Physical education certification	U (Senior)	4.5
Sarah	F	Caucasian	21	Physical Education /Physical education certification	U (Senior)	3.5
Jessica	F	Caucasian	21	Mathematics/Adolescence inclusive education	U (Senior)	3.5
Emily	F	Caucasian	23	Women and Gender Studies/Art & English	U (Senior)	1.5
Jim	M	Hispanic	23	Sociology/Women and Gender Studies	U (Junior)	0.5
Sandra	F	Caucasian	20	Psychology	U (Junior)	2.5
Samantha	F	Caucasian	21	Theatre	U (Senior)	3.5
Kelly	F	Caucasian	21	1. Theatre 2. English (with English Literature concentration)	U (Senior)	3.5
Heather	F	Caucasian	26	Environmental Science	G	1.5

Data Analysis

The FLC researchers completed an inductive thematic analysis using constant comparative method (Glaser, et. al., 1967) to identify common threads that ran across the data. The researchers read the transcripts and notes numerous times. Each researcher highlighted particularly revealing phrases, then coded and assigned meaningful labels to the data. The researchers then discussed the interpretative codes and reviewed variances in the labels until they reached an agreed understanding of

the relational knowing of the data. The researchers continued data analysis by comparing labels and phrases to determine whether to classify data segments separately or within an existing code (Wolcott, 2001). Using pattern regularities, the researchers determined the essential or invariant themes, those that gave fundamental meaning to the students' lived experiences (van Manen, 1997). The authenticity of the findings was further supported as data saturation was reached, whereby repetition of the information and confirmation of previously collected data across participants occurred (Meadows & Morse, 2001). The words of the students supported these themes.

Investigator triangulation enhanced the plausibility of the findings (Creswell, 2006). The researchers possess backgrounds in qualitative inquiry, interview techniques, and knowledge of student leadership. In addition, the researchers used member checks to confirm data and interpretive accuracy. The focus group moderator sent the student participants a description of the transcripts and asked each student to indicate if she/he was correctly represented in the descriptions. Six of the 20 student participants confirmed data accuracy via email back to the researchers and four more validated data accuracy in verbal communication with the researchers. Finally, all researchers participated in data analysis. The co-investigators acknowledged predilections and checked these results by debriefing one another across the data and throughout the research process.

Findings

Procedure of Using an FLC as a Platform to Promote Dialogue on Student Leadership

This Student Leadership FLC provided a platform for faculty and students across disciplines to engage in dialogue on student leadership on campus. The variety of participants' background made this study more accurately reflect the voices of students and faculty members, which increased the quality of the research and its findings. Additionally, this multidisciplinary approach can be replicated by others, serving as a model to further the application of FLCs in multiple campus settings. FLC literature supports this cross pollination as a means to access and develop student leaders (Gebelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990).

The FLC included eleven college professors representing nine departments from five schools across campus. The FLC members shared a passion for developing student leaders and each used techniques in their work that experts identify as variables that promote leadership development, including

but not limited to, experiential learning as team leaders, camp coordinators and project managers; undergraduate research such as writing and presenting; and skill based development in programs like Reserve Officer Training (ROTC) and Theater.

The FLC met bi-weekly throughout the school year. In addition to these regular meetings, the FLC held two focus groups where FLC members discussed traits they believe characterize a good leader in a college setting. The researchers of this study led the FLC member focus groups, sent focus group results to each FLC member for additional comments and ideas, and used this feedback to determine the final traits documented for the purpose of this study. FLC members also met with 20 recruited students from 20 majors/programs as part of one three-hour focus group aimed at understanding students' perspective on leadership. Prior to this meeting, one of the researchers sent an e-mail to student participants describing the research setting and focus group questions. Student focus group participants individually answered four initial interview questions as part of the entire group then broke into small groups to continue collective discussion. As follow-up to this research, in April 2013 an FLC student/faculty panel presented at the college's annual Scholars Day as means to advance the FLC Student Leadership dialogue campus-wide.

This FLC's year-long journey engaged "a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done" (McGill & Beaty, 2001, p. 11). It produced a cross-fertile FLC that modeled ways to foster opportunity for faculty and students across disciplines to engage in dialogue on student leadership on campus. Importantly, it advanced student and faculty understanding of leadership as experienced from diverse spaces of knowledge and identities.

Outcomes of Using an FLC as a Platform to Promote Dialogue on Student Leadership

The FLC configuration in the context of this study exposed ways in which different disciplines engage students in leadership. The Student Leadership FLC offered the platform whereby this study could be conducted in-depth and across campus. Associated with the FLC work and prior to meeting with the student focus group, FLC members identified five important leadership characteristics as significant in developing student leaders: "engagement," "initiative," "ethical behavior," "critical-thinking," and "lived experiences." In thematic analysis of the student focus group, the FLC researchers discovered five dominant themes that overlaid these leadership characteristics: "student engagement," "mentoring,"

“internships and field experiences,” “taking initiative,” and “ethics and goal setting.” A discussion of these five themes follows.

Student Engagement

The theme of student engagement, organic to the FLC focus and a cornerstone of college student leadership development (HERI, 1996; Dugan, et al., 2011; Komives, et al., 2011; Kuh, et al., 2010), intersected all four interview questions presented to students. Students reported that their first leadership experience started before college, most likely in high school, growing out of participation in student organizations, music and arts, sports, or volunteer work. Opportunities to help others, a hallmark to student leadership development literature (HERI, 1996; Komives, et al., 2011), also emerged as a key aspect which students linked with their campus engagement, such as tutoring, volunteering, team sports, campus organizations, and subsequent leadership outcomes. Tiffany, a senior in Physical Education, discovered her leadership growth through volunteer work:

Coming into college I can't really say that I was a leader. I didn't do really well at all. ... Dr. Smith's class helped a lot because there are a lot of volunteer opportunities to work with kids. And I like to think that I went above and beyond to the point that me and J actually started our own program, so probably it wasn't until I found what I liked and what I want to do I decided to step up and change what I was doing.

Faculty and staff members from nine departments joined this FLC, and students from 20 majors/programs participated in this study. This data complements the relationship of student engagement to student success and persistence where students' lived experiences link to leadership outcomes (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This co-curricular-to-leadership bridge, as narrated by students, offers insight into ways students perceive and attribute their own leadership potential. It also highlights means for a multidisciplinary FLC to facilitate student leadership prospects.

Mentoring

Not surprisingly, mentoring as an element connected to leadership resonated with FLC members and the students in this research. Focus group data confirms that students bring to college rich experiences serving as athletes, participants in school and community clubs, and helpers to others at home or in organizational settings. Mentoring in a college setting can further these already existing skills and interests, and it can better deliberate students' growth and development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This FLC discovered mentoring frequently happened on a one-on-one, individualized

basis. Student participants discussed ways unexpected external triggers awakened their leadership ability. In addition to being guided by faculty and staff, students also discussed ways they mentor each other. This peer-to-peer interaction corresponds with the perspective that all students have capacity to demonstrate leadership (HERI, 1996; Komives, et al., 2011). Chloe, a senior Nursing major, shared her experience as a peer mentor:

I would say that my first leadership experience in college was an orientation student advisor for the incoming freshmen classes. ... When I was a freshman I went through a lot of trials and tribulations that I wished I had somebody there to help me with and I wanted to be that person for the new freshman ... I really felt like I was making difference. Especially I was only a sophomore, so I felt like the freshman could relate to me easier than maybe a professor ... That was one of my most memorable experiences.

Using the FLC as a foundation structure establishes opportunities for faculty and staff to act as mentors where they can invite in and further cultivate students' leadership potential. While not a requirement to this FLC membership, 100 percent of FLC members serve as mentors to their students, and in FLC meetings, FLC members frequently exchanged ideas on how mentoring can better facilitate student growth.

College campuses committed to student success must provide opportunities that encourage faculty/student mentoring. Akin to Gebelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith's (1990) thinking on member diversity, interdisciplinary FLCs are fertile venues that enable opportunities for faculty to develop student leaders. Taking students to conferences, presenting at campus research symposiums, and recommending students for positions are examples of how faculty/student mentor relationships develop. Student voices here confirm this potentiality, but they also evidence the "by chance" or fluid nature under which mentoring evolves. This FLC study underscores this finding, and importantly, captures ways to transition faculty/student mentoring from an arbitrary circumstance to a more static variable common to college attendance.

Internships and Field Experiences

Opportunities to participate in campus activities are essential for students to develop leadership skills (Komives, et al., 2011; Dugan, et al., 2011). Our FLC research discovered that every student participant in this study had applied for or sought out an out-of-classroom position on campus, such as positions with student clubs, honors' societies, university police, residential life, leadership programs, freshmen orientation, field experiences, and internships. The required field experience itself can often

network students to additional learning and leading opportunities. The same students agreed that these opportunities helped them develop leadership qualities. Jessica, a Mathematics Education major, talked about how her field experience helped her become a leader:

There are many different roles that you have to take in the classroom. You have to be a leader with the students. ... My first placement led me to volunteer for that (Americore). I tutored and mentored students last semester ... It helped me become a role model, and help students is what I really want to do. It has helped me develop professionally and become a leader.

This finding matches student engagement literature, which underscores the importance of campuses committed to promoting student success to make options like internships and field experiences visible and accessible to students (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 2010). Evident through this study, internship and field work not only provide students opportunities to gain experience in an area they are interested, but also allow students to engage in leadership roles where they develop new skills and gain confidence. Focus group data deepens this finding, helping us see the important nuances to ways students utilize and authenticate experiential learning. Inspired by the research results of this FLC, the college established an Internship FLC that focuses on students' engagement and leadership in internship and field experiences.

Taking Initiative

One of the most important traits student leaders shared with the researchers was the need to take initiative, which experts link with student engagement and is a quality our FLC highlighted as fundamental to student success. Taking initiative in class can be a prominent student learning outcome where student participation frequently links to course success. Group programs can be especially fertile in spurring students to take initiative, particularly when program leaders gather team members together to work collaboratively. Related to taking initiative, focus group data also revealed that student leaders are skilled at handling the unexpected. More than a roll with the punches tendency, this reflective response to situational factors employs an active approach to problem solving that correlates with student engagement and academic persistence (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 2010). As a counter to passivity, we see how taking initiative can prompt positive change:

I notice that we don't know each other really. So, I got some people together ... found some chunks of time there weren't any of those classes and we organized a study group ... It doesn't need to be a big thing either. ... It's silly little thing like that that we can all just take care of instead of waiting for someone else to do.

This FLC study underscores the importance of constructing learning environments that encourage student initiative rather than ones that hand students answers. This fosters self-responsibility and accountability among students and demands constructive input from faculty and staff. Data here, particularly students' self-discovery of ways to initiate and engender behavior, highlights best practices that emphasize active dimensions essential to good teaching and learning. In correlation with student leadership, our FLC research affirms this key teaching/learning dynamic.

Ethics and Goal-Setting

Ethics and goal-setting are two other essential traits connected to student leadership that came out of our discussion with students and were identified by the Student Leadership FLC members. Literature on student engagement theory confirms the significance of moral reasoning as it relates to students' self-actualization of learning and leadership potential (Smith, 1978). Ethical judgment and goal setting go hand in hand as students examined and evaluated their college leading and learning options. Alice, a Spanish and Military Science major, remarked:

I have always been raised with really good ethics and taught to hone on individual goals instead of going on what your friends are doing or what's popular. I have always gone with my own interests and pursued my goals and that has led me to some experiences that I have. Some of those included being in the front and being a leader. Some of those required me taking a step back and learn from others and I think that getting different points of views in different leadership positions definitely helped me to be where I am today.

Students in this study emphasized the importance of assuming leadership roles and taking initiatives in learning environments. Similarly, student leaders talked about the importance of personal accountability and willingness to admit or accept mistakes as well as being passionate, persistent, and honest; all traits the FLC members linked to leadership.

In addition to leading, students discussed the importance of being active followers. Student respondents linked ethical leadership behavior such as thinking on their feet, caring and respecting differences, and seeing and recognizing the bigger picture as important to good decision-making. Student insight into behaviors that overlay leadership development help reveal ways students themselves negotiate college living and learning opportunities. These student insights move the theoretical understanding of leadership development into a praxis arena where FLCs can play an integral role.

Members' Development Through Using an FLC as a Platform to Facilitate Student Leadership

Using an FLC as a space for inquiry and learning, the FLC members in this study developed new perspectives and attitudes about faculty roles in cultivating student leadership. For example, research findings earmark a need for faculty and staff to increase orientation programming focused on leadership opportunities for all incoming students, including freshmen and transfer students. At the research site, the college requires all freshmen to enroll in a one-credit Academic Planning Seminar (APS) and offers this orientation seminar as an option for transfer students. Despite this curricula staple, now a common feature on many campuses, participants suggested that new students might pursue further leadership prospects if introduced to these possibilities at the start of college, and that such experiences would enhance the likelihood that more students would have opportunities to examine their leadership potential.

This FLC research discovered that taking initiative is a fundamental attribute to realizing leadership potential. But getting students to volunteer on top of full-time course schedules, work and family demands is a familiar problem to many campuses. Through this study, FLC members learned different ways to promote student leadership and foster leadership potential in the classroom, such as offering course incentives for volunteering, assigning group projects where students must work collaboratively to complete an assignment, and creating a welcoming and inspiring classroom environment. Student activity outside the classroom also warrants recognition, thereby helping students build solid portfolios. Personal thank you notes, letters of commendation or certificates, or a college authorized co-curricular transcript are examples of ways to recognize and document student extracurricular effort. Using incentive strategies to spur leadership potential underscores the important integration of academic and civic-minded learning activities, a key variable that Kuh (2010) correlates with student success.

This FLC research also recommends strategic ways to connect leadership opportunities with diverse student populations, commuter students in particular, to help bridge the ever-fracturing commuter/student activity gap. For largely residential campuses, as is the case for the research site, meeting the needs of commuter students in areas of leadership development can be a challenge because commuters are often less connected to the institution when compared to their residential counterparts (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 2010). Some commuter-linked leadership strategies that this study identified

include a ride-share board, peer mentor programs, using technology to connect students with leadership opportunities, and most importantly, joining together with students “where they are.”

Impressively, this Student Leadership FLC research accrued several enduring outcomes. The FLC advocated for and successfully established a college-level mentor leadership award that annually recognizes extraordinary faculty who research/publish and/or travel to conferences/present with students. A second legacy to this FLC work, in celebration of student leaders, the FLC initiated a new Scholars Day online journal, *The Spectrum*, which began in 2012 and is now issued annually to showcase student scholarship. This FLC work confirms that colleges must establish an overarching vision that recognizes student leaders, leadership development programs, and mentors who promote student leadership. Official recognition of mentoring and leadership conveys institutional value and priority for such work and raises the bar for what is expected from college citizens. If mentoring and leadership aspects become fixtures in ways colleges assess and reward excellence, faculty, staff, and students are likely to engage. Ramani, Gruppen, and Kachur (2006) affirm that in order to better serve mentees, mentors also need “mentoring, recognition, [to] be awarded, and support” (p. 406).

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to the FLC study. Eleven faculty and staff members across nine departments/disciplines on campus comprised the Faculty Learning Community (FLC) that conducted this research, and these FLC members constituted the student focus group comprised of 20 students from 20 majors/programs. While broad in scope, participation from additional majors/disciplines outside FLC membership, and those from a more diverse demographic would permit the results of this study to be generalized to other populations. Also, the study was executed over one academic year within the confines of a one-year FLC commitment, which limits follow-up opportunities among the FLC members and the students who informed the focus group. Extending an FLC beyond one academic year offers broader ground for additional study and may yield further discoveries. Researchers who are interested in carrying out similar studies using an FLC model should consider these noted limitations.

Conclusion

Unlike the traditional view of the leadership development facilitation as a student affairs responsibility, this FLC study promotes multidisciplinary faculty-staff/student interaction. The FLC on

Student Leadership served as a prompt for engaging student leaders and as a working platform to better see and understand how student leadership opportunities originate and grow on college campuses.

Through student voices realized within the structure and support of a formal learning community, this study revealed the significant role colleges and their faculty and staff play in fostering student leadership and those circumstances and behaviors student leaders exhibit in actualizing leadership potential.

Student development literature (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) documents the positive correlation between leadership activities and student success. This research reifies this important intersection as discovered and grounded in the FLC experience. While strategically transitory in membership and topical focus, FLC legacies can live well beyond the FLC configuration. This is true for the Student Leadership FLC where *The Spectrum*, a scholarly student journal, and a faculty mentor and leadership award, are now fixtures to the college community. These mainstays shine back on the merit of FLCs as cross-fertile spaces where campuses can cultivate new thinking and learning. This resonates with the FLC on student leadership, which grew into a rich site for collaborative research, forging a new path for student leadership innovation.

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