A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF THE COMMISSIONERS COURT

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

A Thesis

by

VALERIE LYNN MCKEE

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Chair of Committee,	Summer F. Odom
Committee Members,	Theresa P. Murphrey
	Lori L. Moore
	Kelli Peck Parrott
Head of Department,	John Elliot

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ABSTRACT

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service created the V.G. Young Institute of County Government to provide educational programs for Texas county officials. The Commissioners Court Leadership Academy (CCLA) is a two-year leadership development program that provides leadership education and development for Texas county commissioners and judges, having implications for community leadership and service throughout the state. The CCLA program has not been evaluated on any level since its creation in 2005. Also, there is a gap in the literature as it pertains to the evaluation of agricultural leadership development programs for county government.

The purpose of this study was to conduct an evaluation of the CCLA program, identify impacts of the program, and determine potential ways to improve the program. The study used qualitative research methods to explore the experiences and opinions of 11 graduates of the CCLA program representing different classes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants of this study, and documents were collected from the participants to document impacts of the program. Common themes were formed from the data collection. It was found that participants described the CCLA program based on their factors for why they chose to participate, the program's structure in terms of sessions and time, and the program's execution in terms of the met objectives and factors for success. It was also found that participants described the impacts of the CCLA program as affective outcomes, behavioral outcomes, and

cognitive outcomes. An overarching outcome of the CCLA program that affected other impacts of the program for participants was their gained network of relationships.

According to the findings of this study, the CCLA program has identified strengths as well as areas for improvement. The researcher made several recommendations for further research and changes to the program based on the study's conclusions. This study provides the CCLA program with a more complete outlook of the program's merits, deficiencies, impacts, and areas for improvement or change.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background And Setting

Agricultural and natural resource leadership programs aim to expand the horizons of leaders involved in agricultural and natural resource pursuits through study and experiences (Carter & Rudd, 2000). In the 1965 proposal to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) requesting the formation of a Farmer's Study Program on Agriculture's Role in an Industrializing Society, the following statement was made:

> Agricultural leadership, as all leadership, rests on an ever-increasing sense of reality, a searching for connections and relationships, an intellect which relates beliefs to the appropriate ends for human activity and the means to achieve such ends. The agriculture sector cannot, any less than others, escape the relatedness of aesthetic, intellectual, and moral values, which are found in cultures other than its own. This is the essence of both leadership and public responsibility.
> (As cited in Carter & Rudd, 2000, p. 199)

The Kellogg Farmer's Study Program funded and formed the origins of many existing agricultural leadership programs in North America (Carter & Rudd, 2000). This program later evolved into the Rural Leadership Development Program (Russon & Reinelt, 2004). The WKKF also launched two leadership development programs in the 1980s that have since marked the foundation's legacy: the Kellogg National Leadership Program (KNLP) and the Kellogg International Leadership Program (KILP) (Russon &

Reinelt, 2004). In the 1990s, other leadership development programs were formed to address specific demographics, including the College Age Youth Leadership Development, The African American Men and Boys Initiative, Grassroots Community Leadership, Community Voices, the Initiative for Developing Equity in African Agriculture, and the Integrated District Development Program. Throughout the years, WKKF's approach to leadership development has changed. Now, WKKF conducts leadership development programs for groups within their communities as opposed to individuals outside of their communities. These changes have initiated questions among WKKF's leadership as to how these programs should be evaluated.

Although today's agricultural leadership development programs vary in size, format, and length, many of them still follow a similar structure to the original Kellogg Farmers' Study Program (Andrews, Kimball, Picard, & Ferris, 1985; Carter & Rudd, 2000). Participants of these programs are exposed to a wide range of state and national issues that are not commodity or sector-specific. Additionally, these programs give participants an overview of other related issues such as the environment, interpersonal relationships, the political system, and urban interface (Johnson, 1998). This is so that participants may understand the various layers of society before they approach dealing with key issues. Program size varies based on location and the number of applicants who are qualified (Johnson, 1998). Potential participants are often determined by sponsoring

organizations, nominations from the industry and program alumni, and from recruitment efforts.

While some of these agricultural leadership development programs are now funded privately, others are mandated through the state's extension organization. According to Diem and Nikola (2005), a variety of extension educational programs have been offered over the last 20 years with the purpose of developing agricultural and community leaders. However, many of these programs have gone unevaluated or unreported.

Heifetz (1996) differentiated formal and informal leadership with arguments that each tackles different issues through different processes. According to Hartley & Allison (2000), the movement to incorporate leadership development in local government has emerged as a way to modernize and improve public services. The government's agenda for modernization contends for an improved role for "local authorities in leading their communities and being responsible for the social, economic and environmental well-being of the locality" (Hartley & Allison, 2000, p. 35). Hartley asserts that community leadership takes place both in the organization and "at the cross-roads of different cultures and organizational forms" (Hartley & Allison, 2000, p. 39), such as between political and managerial activities, with local groups, and in different geographical areas. Influential community leadership requires leaders to work in many different arenas and sites, as well as with people of diverse identities, cultures, and backgrounds.

Across the nation, counties are considered by the court system to be of a lower political order than cities (Chapel Hill, 1950). All counties have a governing leadership

assembly. Historically, this assembly has possessed more judicial and administrative duties than the power to make policy; however, typically county leadership have "the tax levying and appropriating power and wide discretion as to the manner in which state imposed obligations shall be carried out" (Chapel Hill, 1950, p. 10). The actual size and composition of county governing assemblies may vary.

The state of Texas has 254 counties. The Texas judiciary is composed of "a supreme court, a court of criminal appeals, 11 courts of civil appeals, district courts, county courts, commissioners' courts, courts, courts of justices of the peace, city courts, and various special courts" (Chapel Hill, 1950, p. 561). Extension has historically served communities by offering programming to develop leaders for the contexts of public services and agricultural and natural resources (Carter & Rudd, 2000; Earnest, 1996; Horner, 1984; Langone, 1992). The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service created the V.G. Young Institute of County Government in 1969 to provide educational programs for Texas county officials (Texas AgriLife Extension, n.d.). In 2005, the Institute developed a two year agricultural leadership program known as the Commissioners Court Leadership Academy (CCLA) to further enhance the professionalism, broaden the

knowledge, and enrich the experience of county judges and commissioners in Texas. The academy builds advanced skills and knowledge through four objectives:

- To increase knowledge of the origins and varying systems of county government and the interrelationship of local, state and national government systems.

- To develop communication and interpersonal skills to more effectively present ideas and work with community members, colleagues, the media and other elected officials.

- To enhance personal leadership and decision making skills to better represent and lead constituents, counties and associations.

- To improve the ability to serve as an advocate for county issues at all levels of government (Texas AgriLife Extension, n.d.).

To participate in the CCLA, interested county judges and commissioners apply to be selected (Texas AgriLife Extension, n.d.). Applications are reviewed and evaluated based on the applicant's achievements, skills, leadership roles, education and training, personal and professional goals, and participation in professional associations. The program accepts up to 24 participants per two-year class. Throughout the two-year program period, participants must commit to 16 days of educational sessions and travel time. Selected participants attend three three-day sessions, each occurring at locations throughout the state, and one seven-day session in Washington, D.C. All CCLA participants are expected to have "an open and inquiring mind, a willingness to learn, a commitment to actively participate in Academy activities and experiences, [and] a

commitment to greater service for the betterment of Texas county government" (Texas
AgriLife Extension, n.d.).

Statement Of The Problem

The CCLA provides leadership education and development for Texas county
commissioners and judges, having implications for community leadership and service
throughout the state. The CCLA has graduated five classes of participants and boasts 54
alumni. However, there has not been a formal evaluation of the program itself or the
impacts of the program on graduates. Only minor modifications have been made to the
program's structure and sessions since the program's beginning, and the program's
strengths and weaknesses have not been identified. Furthermore, graduates do not have
structured opportunities to engage in the CCLA upon completion of the program.

Purpose Of The Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct an evaluation of the CCLA program,
identify impacts of the program, and determine potential ways to improve the program.
This study will explore the opinions, beliefs, and experiences of graduates of the CCLA
to evaluate the program. The information provided by the graduates will then be used to
describe the impacts of the program, characterize the strengths and weaknesses of the
program, and provide feedback for the program regarding future engagement

possibilities for program graduates. This study is a service to a program that provides a true service to Texas county leadership.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the CCLA program, identify program impacts, and determine possible improvements to the program. To achieve the purpose of this study, two research questions guided the data collection and analysis. The research questions for this study were as follows:

Question 1. How do CCLA graduates describe the program and their experiences in the program?

Questions 2. What are some examples of impacts from the CCLA program?

Definition Of Terms And Concepts

Many of the terms used in this study can be understood using definitions outlined in Webster's dictionary. However, there are certain key terms used in this study that require a clear definition and conceptual background to be understood in the context of this research. The researcher and other sources define these terms as follows:

Program—A program is a process by which an adult education organization and its facilitators work to facilitate and effect planned change in the behavior of targeted learner systems through a planned curriculum (Boone, Safrit, & Jones, 2002). This process includes three main steps: planning, design and implementation, and evaluation and accountability.

Program Evaluation—Program evaluation is a "macro-process that focuses on the planned assessment of every major decision made and action taken throughout the

programming process" (Boone et al., 2002, p. 279). This process includes the measurement of all outcomes achieved from the implementation of the planned program as well as any formative evaluations and summative evaluations of the program.

Formative Evaluation—This is defined as "a continuous process of assessing decisions made and actions taken by the adult educator in planning, designing, and implementing a planned education program" (Boone et al., 2002, p. 279).

Summative Evaluation—This is a process that "focuses on the measurement of the expected and defined macro-outcome sought through the planned program" (Boone et al., 2002, p. 284).

Leader—For the purposes of this study, a leader will be defined as an individual who represents and influences "the members of a group or system in which [he or she holds] membership (target public or stakeholders)" (Boone et al., 2002, p. 280). Leaders may have formal authority as formal leaders of a group, or they may represent the group as informal leaders because of the group's respect or loyalty (Boone et al., 2002).

Leadership—Leadership is "the process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northhouse, 2016, p. 6).

Leader Development—Leader development is defined as "the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes" (McCauley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 1998, pg. 2). Leadership roles and processes are clarified as those that

"facilitate setting direction, creating alignment, and maintaining commitment in groups of people who share common work" (McCauley et al., 1998, p. 2).

Leadership Development-- Leadership development is defined as the expansion of the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes (McCauley et al., 1998).

Community Leadership—The National Extension Task Force on Community Leadership (1986) defines community leadership as that which includes influence, power, and input into public decision-making over one or more domains of activity. These domains may include an organization, area of interest, institution, or location. The community leader's capacity extends beyond the skills necessary to maintain a social service or activities of an organization; skills for community leadership include those essential for public decision-making, policy development, program implementation, and organizational maintenance.

Commissioners Court—The general operation of county government in the state of Texas is overseen by the commissioners court (Texas Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1980). The commissioners court includes four commissioners and one county judge. The commissioners court is not a judicial court; however, the commissioners court is responsible for making sure the county complies with state law and responds to the needs of its residents.

County Commissioner in the state of Texas—Texas counties are divided into four separate precincts (Texas Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1980). A county commissioner is elected from each precinct to serve a term of four years.

County commissioners carry out duties as required by the commissioners court and are often responsible for overseeing the construction and maintenance of county roads in his or her precinct.

County Judge in the state of Texas—The county judge is elected by the county to serve as the presiding officer of the commissioners court (Texas Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1980). The county judge represents the county at ceremonies and on boards and committees. Other duties and responsibilities of the county judge depend partly on the size of the county in which he or she serves.

Basic Assumptions

This study operates under certain assumptions. These assumptions include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Program graduates are truthful in answering interview questions.

2. The program has impacts, strengths, and weaknesses that are recognizable to graduates.

3. Full and reasonable responses are received from those agreeing to participate in this study.

Scope And Limitations Of The Study

This study is limited by its reach and application to a larger degree. The study solely looks at one extension-based leadership development program for public servants in the state of Texas. Whereas this study describes the first-hand experiences and impacts of the participants from the CCLA program, it does not consider second-hand experiences and impacts from the program such as those of the graduates' families and

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coworkers. The primary limitation of this study is that the findings are not generalizable to other leadership development programs.

Importance Of The Study

According to Johnson (1998), agricultural leadership development programs have an impressive potential to make change because of their longevity and production of lifetime leaders and learners. Although there is literature that addresses the evaluation of agricultural leadership development programs and the impacts of such programs (Black, 2006; Carter & Rudd, 2000; Diem & Nikola, 2005; Earnest, 1996; Kelsey & Wall, 2003; Russon & Reinelt, 2004; Van De Valk, 2011), there is a lack of research on programs and impacts specific to community leadership in counties. As an agricultural leadership development program provided by Texas AgriLife Extension, the CCLA program has implications for changes in county governments and communities across the state of Texas. Texas county leaders are challenged to work with limited resources, increasing demands for services, emerging technologies, changing demographics, and other issues that will affect the future (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, n.d.). These types of challenges must not only be met with managerial competencies like rule orientation, short-term planning, extrinsic motivation, orderliness, concern for safety, and timeliness; they also require leadership competencies like intrinsic motivation, creative thinking, strategic planning, tolerance of ambiguity, and the ability to understand people (Simonet & Tett, 2012). The quality and effectiveness of the CCLA leadership development program influences the quality and effectiveness of the program's graduates as community leaders in their respective counties. Without a

research-based evaluation, the CCLA program will forgo knowing its effectiveness at meeting program objectives and producing leaders. Furthermore, the current CCLA program director desires to know what program graduates think about the program sessions, overall structure, and possibility of future engagement opportunities within the academy (P. McGuill, personal communication, June 9, 2015).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Program Evaluation

Organizations of all kinds must be able to continuously improve themselves in order to respond to challenges and be effective (Immordino, 2010). There is an increasing demand in the field of leadership development to have program evaluations demonstrating outcomes and impacts (Russon & Reinelt, 2004). In particular, leadership development program staff and directors seek information about the outcomes and impacts of their programs in order to demonstrate program effectiveness. These outcomes and impacts can be evaluated on multiple levels. Most program evaluations focus on the individual outcomes such as "knowledge, skills, attitudes, and perceptions; changes in behavior; changes in values and beliefs; leadership paths; and, relationships" (p. 105). Outcomes and impacts are also evaluated at more complex levels such as the organizational, community, field, and systems levels.

Russon and Reinelt (2004) found in their scan of 55 leadership development programs that "sometimes there are disconnects between leadership development program activities and the outcomes and impact that they hope to attain" (Russon & Reinelt, 2004, p. 105). For example, some programs seek to attain outcomes and impacts at the organizational, community, field, or systems levels; yet, the program implements activities that primarily focus on the individual level. The study also found that many programs desire a mid- to long-term evaluation of their programs' outcomes and

impacts. However, because program funders desire to see immediate results, program evaluations often focus on short-term outputs. The evaluation of mid- to long-term outcomes and impacts requires time and resources that some programs cannot afford. Furthermore, some programs do not possess the knowledge about how to conduct an effective long-term evaluation.

Quantitative Program Evaluations

There have been many studies regarding the evaluation of leadership development programs (Black, 2006; Carter & Rudd, 2000; Diem & Nikola, 2005; Earnest, 1996; Fredericks, 2003; Kelsey & Wall, 2003; Russon & Reinelt, 2004; Van De Valk, 2010). Black (2006) acknowledged that whereas millions of dollars have been invested in existing statewide agricultural leadership programs, little evidence exists to document the outcomes of these programs. In an evaluation of a statewide agricultural leadership program in Ohio, Black (2006) used focus groups to develop a survey instrument based upon the EvaluLEAD framework (Grove, Kibel, & Haas, 2005). This instrument was then used to survey alumni of Ohio's Leadership, Education and Development (LEAD) program to evaluate program outcomes on individual, organizational, and community levels (Black, 2006). While alumni reported several positive outcomes from the program on the individual and organizational levels, only one positive outcome existed on the community level.

A statewide agricultural leadership program in the state of New Jersey was evaluated using survey methods to determine lasting impacts of the program on participants' lives and careers (Diem & Nikola, 2005). A questionnaire was sent to 63

participants from the first three classes that completed the New Jersey Agricultural Leadership Development Program (NJALDP); a total of 50 usable surveys were returned, yielding a 79% overall response rate. Findings from the questionnaires were categorized by related questions in regards to knowledge gained, most useful knowledge or skills learned, changed practices since completing the program, lasting impacts, accomplishments, and changes in participants' professional and personal lives, and participant satisfaction. With regard to knowledge gained from the program, participants of the study reported percentage increases in several topics, with the highest increases in knowledge of primary functions and inter-relationships of New Jersey's major agricultural organizations (113%) and knowledge of federal government, legislative and lobbying process (100%). With regard to the most useful knowledge and skills learned from the program, participants reported open-ended responses including confidence in public speaking, networking, learning about another culture, and time management. Participants reported having changed several practices based on a fixed list of choices related to the goals of the program, this including being able to speak more effectively (98%), having spoken at meetings, hearings, etc. (86%), and having advanced in their business/career or changed jobs (80%).

Qualitative And Mixed-Method Program Evaluations

In an evaluation of a statewide agricultural leadership program in Florida, alumni, alumni spouses, and business associates were interviewed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and to determine if the program was meeting its objectives (Carter & Rudd, 2000). Questions used in the interviews were derived from four

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constructs obtained from the objectives of the Florida Leadership Program and the original Kellogg Program. These four construct areas were identified as "People Skills, Policy Development, Analytical Skills, and Personal Skills" (Carter & Rudd, 2000, p. 202). In this study, Carter and Rudd (2000) found common themes that were closely related to the objectives of the Florida Leadership Program for Agriculture and Natural Resources (FLPANR). Major themes that emerged from the interviews were: networking, a broader perspective of issues, an increased knowledge of people's personalities, and a continued desire to learn and keep learning throughout their life. Based on their findings, Carter and Rudd (2000) concluded that the program is meeting and exceeding the program's objectives.

Community leadership development programs in the state of Ohio were also evaluated to assess their impacts on program participants' leadership skills (Earnest, 1996). Ohio State University (OSU) Extension, in partnership with Project EXCEL (Excellence in Community Elected and Appointed Leadership) works with counties in Ohio to develop and teach community leadership programs. Fifty-seven participants of seven county programs completed Kouzes' and Posner's (1993) Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) as pre- and post-assessments with an 85.1% response rate (Earnest, 1996). Program participants significantly increased their leadership skills in each area of the LPI, including challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with the seven program directors, and focus group interviews were conducted with six alumni groups. Common themes of personal benefits, community benefits,

program benefits, and program improvements were found from the interviews. The most common benefits reported by alumni included: increased networking, a greater understanding and ability to interact with people, increased self-confidence and personal motivation to become involved in community affairs, and recognition of their leadership responsibility as a citizen.

Social Capital As A Program Outcome

Social capital is defined as "features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995, p. 67). Many leadership development programs assert that participants' personal and professional networks are enhanced as a result of their participation (Van De Valk & Constas, 2011). However, in a review of studies on the evaluation of leadership development programs using criterion established by Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002), Van De Valk and Constas (2011) concluded there is not enough literature to support a causal relationship between leadership development programs and social capital. Van De Valk (2008) noted that while networking is often cited as a benefit of participating in leadership development programs and is an important step in enhancing social capital, research is still needed to better understand the dynamic relationship between social capital and leadership. According to Gopee (2002), social capital is important to the role of interaction in learning because it is the main process which adults learn in the context of organizations.

In a qualitative study examining how a particular leadership training program initiates social capital through established and maintained networks, Terroin (2006)

found social capital to be beneficial to program success in several ways. The participants' social networks formed as a result of the program helped to ensure their continuous, informal learning through ongoing interaction with their peers. Social capital as a result of programming also enhances participants' sense of belonging and bonding. According to Terroin (2006), bonding social capital is important for leadership training because it is foundational to development of bridging social capital. Bridging social capital is formed through the interaction of diverse people and has implications for leadership challenges associated with a multicultural workforce.

Theories Of Adult Learning And Leadership Development

Because the program being evaluated in this study involves the leadership development of adults, a review of theories related to: understanding of different learning orientations, assumptions of adult learning, leadership development and programming, and espoused theory versus theory-in-use, can help to provide a lens to evaluate this program.

Leadership Development And Programming

According to Bolton (1991), leadership is not an innate trait, but can be developed through formal and informal training. Traditionally, leadership has been conceptualized and tested as an individual-level skill (Day, 2000). For example, transformational leadership theory asserts that transformational leaders engage in behaviors categorized under the dimensions of charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Research and testing of this theory assumes "an individualistic conceptualization of leadership, in which sharp distinction is drawn

between leaders and followers" (Day, 2000, p. 583), whereas followers evaluate their leader using specific criteria. Consequently, traditional approaches for developing transformational leaders included training the individual and focusing on intrapersonal skills and characteristics. However, such approaches do not always recognize leadership as a dynamic interaction between the leader and his or her social and organizational environment (Fiedler, 1996). Thus, these approaches are considered leader development approaches because of their focus on the individual expansion of the leader's capacity to be effective (McCauley et al., 1998). In comparison, leadership development focuses on the expansion of the collective capacity of organizational members to be effective in various leadership roles and processes.

The differences between leader development and leadership development have implications for how leadership trainers approach developing leaders. For example, the many aspects that make up leader development and leadership development can be advanced through properly designed leadership projects or programs (Earnest, 1996). As Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) asserted leadership and its effectiveness is dependent upon the context, it is logical to approach the development of leadership through contextualized programming.

Learning Orientations

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) discuss five orientations to learning: behaviorism, cognitive orientation, humanist orientation, social learning, and constructivism. Each of

these orientations will be described for the purpose of establishing a foundation for this study's conceptual framework.

There are three basic assumptions to the behaviorist orientation of learning (Grippin & Peters, 1984). First, learning is observable through changes in behavior. Second, the learned behavior is determined and shaped by the environment and its elements and not by the individual learner. Third, the principles of contiguity, or how close in time two events must be to be connected, and reinforcement, or any means of increasing the odds of an event to happen again, are crucial to explaining the learning process. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), the locus of learning for the behaviorist orientation is stimuli in the external environment. The educator's role in the behaviorist learning process is to arrange the environment to elicit the desired response. In the adult learning setting, the behaviorist learning process is manifested through behavioral objectives, competency-based education, and skill development and training.

According to the cognitivist, "the human mind is not simply a passive exchange-terminal system where the stimuli arrive and the appropriate response leaves. Rather, the thinking person interprets sensations and gives meaning to the events that impinge upon his consciousness." (Grippins & Peters, 1984, p. 76). The locus of cognitive learning involves the internal reorganization and structuring of experiences to make sense of stimuli from the environment (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The process includes insight, information processing, memory, and perception. From this perspective, education is purposed to develop one's capacity and skills to learn better, and the educator in responsible for structuring the content to be learned. Cognitivism is

manifested in adult learning through cognitive development, learning how to learn, and intelligence, learning, and memory as a function of age.

Humanist theorists like Rogers (1983) and Maslow (1970) assert that people: control their own destiny, are inherently good and seek to make the world better, are free to act and behave as they choose, and possess unlimited potential for growth and development. Humanism is built upon the understanding that perceptions are centered in experience along with one's freedom and responsibility to achieve one's potential (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The humanist orientation to learning sees the process of learning as a personal act to fulfill one's potential. Both affective and cognitive needs drive this process as the learner seeks to become self-actualized and autonomous. In this learning process, the educator takes on facilitating the development of the whole person. The humanist approach is manifested in adult learning through andragogy and self-directed learning.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) describe social learning theory as combining elements of behaviorism and cognitivist orientations. Bandura's (1986) work on social learning theory accounts for both the learner and the environment as interacting parts to learning; behavior is influenced by the environment, which is influenced by people. The learning process is a result of the interaction with and observation of others in a social context (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Under this approach to learning, the goal of education is to model new roles and behaviors, and the educator's role is to model and

guide the new roles and behaviors. Social learning is manifested in adult learning through socialization, social roles, mentoring, and internal locus of control.

The constructivist maintains the belief that "learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261). The constructed meaning is made by the learner and is dependent on the learner's past and present knowledge structure. Learning is therefore a result of the learner's internal construction of reality. An education based on constructivism is purposed to help the pupil construct knowledge through educators who facilitate and negotiate the constructed meaning with the pupil. Constructivism can be manifested in adult learning in the form of experiential learning, self-directed learning, perspective transformation, and reflective practice.

Espoused Theory Versus Theory-In-Use

According to Argyris and Schon (1974), all human action is based on theories of action. There is a difference between espoused theories of action and theories-in-use. Espoused theories of action are those that are reported as a basis for one's actions (Argyris, 1976). Theories-in-use are the theories of action concluded from how people actually behave, including any relatively or directly observable behaviors. According to the behavioral findings of Argyris (1976), "most individuals studied seem to be able to detect the discrepancies between their espoused theories and theories-in-use of others, but were not able to detect similar discrepancies in themselves" (p. 367).

Learning eventually results in changes of action and not just the taking in of new information and formation of new ideas (Senge, 1992). According to Senge, gaps

between espoused theories and theories-in-use should not cause discouragement as they can arise as a consequence of vision. Senge says that the recognition of the gap between espoused theories and theories-in-use is the first step in learning. Furthermore, if an individual does not value the espoused theory as part of his or her vision, then there is no real tension between the person's reality and vision.

Assumptions Of Adult Learning

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) list six assumptions that differentiate adult learning from pedagogy:

1. *The need to know.* Adults are motivated to learn by knowing first why they need to learn something. Adult educators must therefore approach the learner with why they need to know what will be taught. At the very least, the adult educator can establish the value of learning something because of how it will improve the effectiveness of the learner's performance or quality of life.

2. *The learner's self-concept.* Adults hold the belief of being responsible for their own decisions and lives. This self-concept drives adults to need to be recognized and treated by others as being capable of self-direction. Consequently, adult learners resent and resist situations where others might be imposing their wills on them. Adult educators have to create learning experiences where adults can make the transition from dependent to self-directed.

3. *The role of the learners' experiences.* Adults enter an educational activity with a greater wealth and depth of experience than that of youths. The quality and quantity of adults' experiences guarantees that any group of adult learners will

include a wide range of individual differences. Adult educators are thus given

the task of individualizing teaching and learning strategies. Adult educators may

also turn to the adult learners as the richest sources of learning through

experiential techniques that tap into the experiences of the learners. Also,

because adults tend to define themselves by their experiences, it is important for

the adult educator to acknowledge and value their experiences so as to accept

their self-identities.

4. *Readiness to learn.* In order to cope with reality, adults are ready to learn things

   they need to know and be able to do. Associating learning with the process of

   moving on to the next stage of development is one way adult educators can

   capitalize on adults readiness to learn; learning should be timed with tasks

   associated with growth and development.

5. *Orientation to learning.* In contrast to youths' subject-centered orientation to

   learning in educational settings, adults are life-centered, task-centered, or

   problem-centered. Motivation for adult learners is based on how they perceive

   that learning will assist them in life situations. The context of application to real-

life situations also helps adult learners receive new knowledge, understanding, skills, values, and attitudes more effectively.

6. *Motivation.* Although adults do respond to some external motivators like promotions or higher salaries, internal pressures like the desire for job satisfaction, self-esteem, and greater quality of life are stronger adult motivators.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was developed to guide the understanding of this study. This framework is composed of three parts: a review of adult learning and leadership development theories, the examination of the CCLA program structure, and the exploration of CCLA program outcomes. The review of adult learning and leadership development theories is necessary to understand how the CCLA program operates. The CCLA program structure lies at the center of this framework as it functions as the operational product of the review of adult learning and leadership development theories. The outcomes of the CCLA program are a byproduct of the program structure and its practice of the reviewed theories. The review of adult learning and leadership development theories was provided in this chapter. The program structure was discussed in the first chapter of this study, and was more closely examined through the methods used in this study. The program outcomes were also explored through the methods of this study. Figure 1 is a conceptual model that depicts the parts of this framework as they work together:
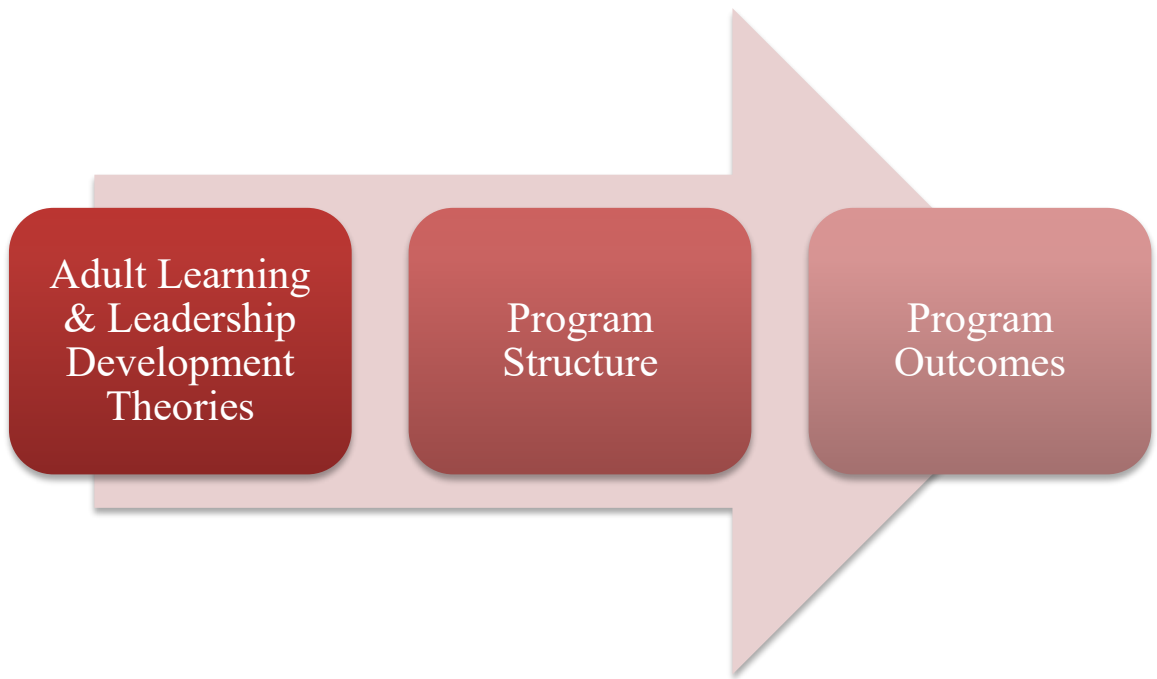
Figure 1. Conceptual framework for a qualitative evaluation of the Commissioners

Court Leadership Academy.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research involves studying people or things in a natural environment in order to better understand their meaning (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is predominantly inductive in nature as opposed to the deductive research process that quantitative research methods employ (Klenke, 2008).

Until recently, qualitative studies on leadership were considered relatively rare (Klenke, 2008). The history of leadership as a discipline reveals that the traditional social science repertoire of quantitative methodologies was heavily relied upon to identify and understand leadership problems. However, whereas quantitative methods are ideal for testing leadership hypotheses with large samples and replicating studies across settings, this type of approach is poorly suited to help in understanding "the meanings leaders and followers ascribe to significant events in their lives and the success or failure of their organizations" (Klenke, 2008, p. 4). When compared with the same amount of applied rigor and concern for validity and quality, qualitative leadership studies offer several advantages over quantitative leadership studies. In particular, qualitative approaches to studying leadership offer more opportunities "to explore leadership phenomena in significant depth, do so longitudinally, and answer 'why' types of questions about leadership as opposed to 'how' and 'what' types of questions answered by quantitative research" (p. 5). According to Geertz (1973), qualitative

research methods add value to the study of leadership because they provide rich, thick description of phenomena, which helps in the capture of multiple views and voices. Also, qualitative methods in leadership studies offer ways to explore symbolic dimensions (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

A qualitative methods approach was appropriate for answering the research questions in this study. This research design allowed for special attention to be given to the exploration of program graduates' opinions, beliefs, and experiences. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the CCLA program, identify impacts of the program, and determine potential ways to improve the program. Although the literature in chapter two references both quantitative and qualitative studies with similar purposes to this study, the researcher chose to evaluate the CCLA program qualitatively with this in mind:

> Evaluations of programs that aim to affect the lives of participants they serve have frequently been criticized for focusing on numbers and not on the people themselves – for counting bodies while missing souls, failing to capture the human drama and associated opportunities for affecting individuals in a profound ways. (Grove, Kibel, & Haas, 2005, p. 13)

The specific research questions for this study were as follows:

Question 1. How do CCLA graduates describe the program and their experiences in the program?

Question 2. What are some of the impacts from the CCLA program?

Purposeful Sampling

The target population for this study is the graduates of the CCLA program from 2005 to 2015. The researcher used a typical purposeful sampling, meaning the selection of participants kept in mind what the average person of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009, p. 78), to select participants for the study. In this study, maximum variation of the subjects was sought through a process of selection based on graduates' CCLA class number, class size, gender, geographic location, and position held in their counties. The CCLA program has graduated approximately 54 participants since its formation ten years ago. Within each two-year class, the number of graduates varies depending on the year and the number of applicants. The researcher contacted participants of the study for their consent using email protocol.

According to Patton (2002), maximum variation sampling is ideal for diversifying your sample population to "avoid one-sidedness of representation of the topic" (p. 109). To purposefully select participants for the study with maximum variation in mind, the researcher developed a system for selection. First, the researcher reviewed a list of graduate names printed in order of class number; the names within each class were listed in alphabetical order by the county he or she represents. The research pre-determined a number of class members to contact initially based on the total number of members in each class. Classes one, two, and three graduated seven, 10, and seven participants, respectively. The researcher chose to initially contact three members of each of these classes to participate in the study. Classes four and five graduated 17 and

14 members, respectively. The researcher chose to select four members of each of these classes initially to participate in the study.

Then, because of the significantly low number of female graduates listed, the researcher selected at least half of the number of females in each of the classes to be contacted initially for participation in the study. Finally, the differentiation of regional representation, as outlined by the Regional Associations of County Judges and Commissioners (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, n.d.), was determined as a factor for the selection of participants to initially contact to be in the study. Using the initial criteria of class number, class size, gender, and regional representation, the researcher began at the top of the list of names for each class to select participants to contact for the study. Of the initial 17 graduates contacted by email to request participation in the study, eight graduates responded, seven of whom agreeing to participate in the study.

For the second attempt to contact graduates of the program the researcher used similar criteria for selection; however, in the second attempt the researcher selected four graduate names to contact from classes one and two. Also, the researcher paid attention to whether the graduate represents a county that had not yet been represented by those graduates who were initially contacted and agreed to participate in the study; this rule was ignored if the graduate is female. Some graduates were also passed over in the second selection process based on their regional and county location; the researcher wanted to purposefully contact graduates from across the state and as equally as possible by region. Of the 19 graduates contacted for study participation, five graduates responded and agreed to participate in the study. After completing interviews with the

eleven graduates who agreed to participate in the study, the researcher did not select and contact more graduates due to arriving at data saturation (Merriam, 2009).

The 11 participants of this study represent all five graduated classes of the program. Three participants represented class I. Three participants represented class II. One participant represented class III. Three participants represented class IV. One participant represented class V. There were three female participants and eight male participants in this study. Four of the participants currently serve as county judges, and seven of the participants currently serve as county commissioners. Participants serve in counties located in southeast Texas, central Texas, northwest Texas, and west Texas.

Data Collection

For this study, data collection consisted of interviews and the collection of documents and records. An interview is considered to be "a conversation with a purpose" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268). Through interviews, a researcher may obtain information about the subject's experiences including their feelings, concerns, questions, and motivations. An interview also allows the researcher to ask for clarification on the interpretation of other sources, which may include documents, records, and earlier interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to ask graduates of the CCLA program about their perceptions and opinions regarding the impacts of the program, the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and future engagement with the program. The interview questions were open-ended in order to collect data for the following areas:

- Reasons for participation in the program

- Impacts of the program on graduates' personal life

- Impacts of the program on graduates' leadership

- Impacts of the program on graduates' career

- Impacts of the program on other areas

- Strengths of the program, including areas that need no improvement

- Weaknesses of the program, including areas to be improved

- The level of desired future engagement in the program

- Recommendations for future opportunities to engage graduates in the program

All of the selected graduates were interviewed either in person, by phone, or through email. The interviews took no longer than 90 minutes. Field notes were used to document the interviews. The researcher used "empathic neutrality and mindfulness" as a fieldwork strategy when interviewing the participants (Patton, 2002, p. 40). This strategy is defined as having "an empathic stance in interviewing" and "understanding without judgment (neutrality) by showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness" (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

Participants were also asked for any documents and records, which pertain to examples of the impacts of the CCLA Leadership Academy. Documents and records are another source of data that added value to the study. These pieces of information served as proof of past experiences. The researcher was responsible for gaining proper permission to view any documents and records (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The examples of documents and records that the researcher attempted to collect from the participants in

this study included emails, correspondences with constituents, awards, written articles, and other items demonstrating the impact of the CCLA program.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized a constant comparative analysis strategy to identify emerging themes (Merriam, 2009). Through this method, categories of data were formed as the researcher recognized similarities and differences in the data. These similarities and differences were grouped on a similar dimension. The dimension was tentatively given a categorical name. The researcher continued in this process until patterns were identified in the data and conclusions were reached about the findings.

Upon completion of each interview, the handwritten field notes were typed and organized by the interview questions asked. Participants were assigned a random number; these numbers were used to code the participants' responses. All coded responses were then categorized by the interview questions asked; some responses were categorized under more than one question as it applied. Interview question categories were broken down into similar areas. Themes were then identified from these areas.

"Inductive analysis and creative synthesis" was a qualitative analysis strategy utilized by the researcher. Patton (2002) described this strategy as the researcher being immersed "in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships" (p. 41). The researcher begins this process by exploring through the data collection methods, then confirming the data collected (Patton, 2002). Analytical principles guide this process rather than rules, and it ends with a creative synthesis. The researcher also utilized a "unique case orientation" while analyzing the

data (Patton, 2002, 41). The researcher assumed each interview was special and unique, and thus was true and respectful when she captured the details of each interview (Patton, 2002).

Study Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the basic issue in relation to a study's trustworthiness lies in how the inquirer persuades his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to and taking account of. Conventional paradigms for inquiries address this issue through determining the study's internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the appropriate criteria for the trustworthiness of the naturalistic paradigm include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

This study confirmed credibility of the data collected through the use of triangulation in the data interpretation process. First, multiple sources of data allowed for triangulation of the sources as the data collected came from people with different perspectives (Merriam, 2009). Also, "methods triangulation" occurred through the use of different methods of data collection, including interviews and documents (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Second, peer debriefs, also known as analyst triangulation, helped with overseeing the data analysis so as to triangulate the interpretation of the data through independent perspectives (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The researcher performed "theory/perspective triangulation" by using multiple perspectives or theories to interpret the data (Patton, 2002, p. 556).

This study also assured trustworthiness through respondent validation, or member checking. The researcher solicited feedback on data interpretations by taking the preliminary analysis of the data collected and sending it back to the participants in the study for their confirmation. Furthermore, maximum variation of the sample selected to use in this study ensured a greater chance of data trustworthiness.

Rich, thick descriptions of the findings provided readers with enough contexts to understand the transferability of the study to their current situations. According to Patton (2002), rich, thick description "forms the bedrock of all qualitative reporting," and "thick evaluation descriptions take those who need to use the evaluation findings into the experience and outcomes of the program" (p. 438). Lastly, audit trails were used to examine the data process and outcomes and establish dependability and confirmability in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Audit trail categories used in this study include raw data, process notes, data reconstruction and synthesis products (including created themes and categories), and the study's research proposal.

Researcher Credibility

Because the researcher is the instrument in any qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002), the researcher must report all biases and personal information that may affect the study's findings. To maintain an ethical approach in this study, the researcher underwent critical self-reflection in regards to any assumptions, biases, or relationships to the nature of the study's investigation. Whereas the researcher recognized her strong beliefs in the positive impacts of leadership development programs in general, the researcher put all beliefs aside so as to objectively interview participants about their experiences in the

CCLA program. The researcher has no direct relationship to the CCLA program or its

graduates.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the CCLA program, identify impacts of the program, and determine ways to improve the program. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

Question 1. How do CCLA graduates describe the program and their experiences in the program?

Questions 2. What are some of the impacts from the CCLA program?

The findings of this study will be discussed according to the research questions and through the themes identified from the methods described in chapter three.

How Do CCLA Graduates Describe The Program And Their Experiences In The Program?

To answer question one of this study, the following themes emerged from the data: Program Participation Factors, Program Structure, and Program Execution. The themes were broken down into subthemes for greater depth of discussion and understanding. Participants were asked to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the program; their opinions will also be discussed within each of these themes.

Program Participation Factors

The first theme to be discussed in this study's findings for question one is the theme of program participation factors. In their descriptions of the program and their experiences in the program, participants described six general subthemes for factors of

participation in the academy. The following subthemes were identified from the participants' responses as factors of participation in the CCLA program: advertisement methods, recommendations, education as a value, service as a value, leadership as a value, experience, and cost.

Advertisement methods

Whereas participants conveyed that the CCLA program does employ advertisement methods to contact county commissioners and judges across the state of Texas (P4, P5, P9, & P10), their opinions on the effectiveness of these methods differed. Participant P4 said, "We all got the notification to apply." The program uses ads in a publicized county commissioners magazine to reach potential participants (P5). Participant P9 explained the academy is promoted at all of the V.G. Young conferences. Participant P10 said he "received the letter" inviting him to consider participating in the academy "and got the appropriate references to apply." However, participant P6 said one of the program's weaknesses is in its advertisement methods. According to participant P6, the academy needs to "promote itself more" and "blow its horn a bit more."

Recommendations

Recommendations to participate in the academy were a significant factor in participants' rationale to apply for the program (P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, & P11). In particular, recommendations from the former CCLA director Rick Avery and from previous graduates played a role in participants' consideration of the program.

Rick Avery served as the director of the CCLA program from its inception in 2005 until 2015. Participant P6 said that he "found out about [the academy] through

Rick Avery [the former CCLA director]" and then decided to take the opportunity to apply. Participant P7 conveyed that a county extension agent he knew recommended his name to Rick Avery to contact for the inaugural class. Rick Avery also recommended the academy to participant P10 because of its many benefits. When Rick Avery was preparing for the first class of the program, he approached many others with the opportunity as "he needed guinea pigs for his baby" (P11).

The recommendations from peers were highly influential in participants' consideration of the program (P4, P5, P8, P9, & P10). Participant P4 said he "met folks who had been in the program" who he highly admired. "That was the best recommendation that I could get…I respected them and…I wanted to emulate them," said participant P4. A member from Class I recommended that participant P5 apply for the program. "He said I'd really benefit from it," said participant P5. A fellow commissioners court member who was friends with director Rick Avery approached participant P8 with the possibility of applying for the program. Likewise, participants P9 and P10 both considered the academy because of the recommendations from fellow commissioners court members who had graduated from the program.

Education as a value

It was evident from the data that participants value education. The value of education was evident in their responses through their enthusiasm for continuous learning and their specific interest in the program's curriculum. Furthermore, participants compared the education they received from the academy with the other forms of education offered to them through the Texas Association of Counties. These

other forms of education provide options for Texas county court members to meet their mandated hours of county government education.

Participants in the study expressed a sincere enthusiasm for continuous learning in their lives (P1, P2, P6, P7, P11). Participant P1 said she likes to learn about herself and tries to do her "homework" in regards to learning throughout her life. Participant P2 said, "Continuing education is an important factor for commissioners. For me to be effective, education is hugely important." Participant P6 is particularly passionate about continuous learning and the importance of education. He said:

> Education is imperative—the only way we get better as a society is through change. Anything we can do through programs and education that will use knowledge from the past and mold it into education for the future… that is what truly advances us." (P6)

For participant P6, continuous learning and growth is comparable to a law degree. "Growth is continual—it's not just what you learned when you earned your law degree; it's how you use it afterwards" said participant P6. In regards to what he learned from the program, participant P6 continued, "You grow throughout your life. It's not just that I learned in those two years and that's it. It's what I learned and put into action and learned from those actions since then." Participants P7 and P11 echoed similar sentiments, both saying that learning from their experiences has allowed them to move forward in their careers.

While the general desire to continue learning motivated many participants to consider the program, several others conveyed that the program's curriculum and

content appeared exciting (P6), "beneficial" (P8 & 10), opportunistic (P7, P9, & P11), and interesting (P9). Participant P6 said that he wanted to be a part of the academy because of the "excitement of the new program;" he was among those enrolled in the first class and conveyed that there was much anticipation built around the start of the program. After hearing about the success of the first class, participant P7 applied for the second class of the academy, saying, "I've always thought that leadership training was very beneficial — I jumped at the opportunity." Participants P8 and P9 both said they looked at the program's agenda before considering to apply. "The agenda really intrigued me," said participant P9. Along with being allured by the travel opportunities to DC and Austin, participant P9 conveyed he was interested in the media training. "Seeing that workshop in the agenda really peeked my interest," said participant P9.

Interest in the program's educational topics was also described by participants in comparison to the other forms of education provided to county court members. Participant P2 said the information taught at other conferences "is almost being regurgitated," and consequently the academy "started leading county government" with new education. Participant P4 shared a different perspective, saying the academy "takes what is taught in the associations and conferences and reinforces those concepts." Participant P5 echoed similar thoughts, saying that all of the conferences provided by the V.G. Young Institute and Texas Association of Counties "have helped to prepare us to do our jobs." Participant P6 conveyed one of the main differences between the V.G. Young program and education offered by the Texas Association of Counties is V.G. Young allows participants to "learn from peers across the state" and "grow in

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relationship" with others in county government. Also, participant P6 explained the program has its benefits because of its concentration on specific topics and application to county judges and commissioners, whereas education provided by Texas Association of Counties deals with "different offices within the courthouse" such as clerks and sheriffs. "The [mandated] education classes teach you statistics and statues and procedures and how to work in a courtroom, but it doesn't go into how to implement it. The difference between the education classes and the leadership classes is paper versus people, " said participant P6. Participant P8 compared her experiences in the academy with other leadership trainings she went though. "It was one of the better things I have done…I have had the privilege of going through many leadership trainings, and this was by far the best leadership training I've seen," said participant P8.

Service as a value

Beyond participants' value for education, it was clear from the responses that the participants value service and this value motivated participants to apply for the academy. All of the participants conveyed passion for their positions in county government and dedication to serving others through their positions. Participant P1 said she enjoys "the idea of being responsible for another person" and feels a "concern that [she] can always do more" as a public servant. In regards to why she serves in her position, participant P1 said, "It's not so much the leadership; it's the service to the community." Participants P2, P5, P6, and P9 all made statements conveying their sincere passion for their jobs. Participants P1 and P6 spoke to the general knowledge of their constituents, saying the public does not know what commissioners court members do or why they serve. Other

participants expressed concern for their counties and the need to be equipped with knowledge to serve them better (P3, P6, P7, P9, & P10). Participant P7 conveyed he represents a "rural county" that is "becoming more urban," and thus the question he and his fellow commissioners must address is "What do we want the county to look like in the future?" He said, "It's easy to worry about the budget for 2016, but what do we need to be focusing on for the future? The way we do business will be changing in the future" (P7). Participant P9 said, "No county is safe from incidents," which is why he wants to be prepared for his county. "Participating in the Academy will pay in dividends down the road [for your county]," said participant P9.

Leadership as a value

A third value that was evident as a factor in participants' choice to go through the academy was their value of leadership (P4, P6, & P7). Participant P4 expressed his "aspirations of going on and moving forward in [his] career as maybe becoming a judge one day," were part of his decision to apply for the program. Participant P6 said: One of the things about local government I believe is true is that we should continue to grow and develop leaders—we have a responsibility to grow leaders to take our place in county government…If people really have a desire to serve their counties then they should have a desire to participate in leadership programs…Every county, every individual in a leadership role needs to improve in their leadership skills if they truly want to serve the public well. (P6)

Participant P7 related his career background motivated his desire to receive leadership training. Participant P7 said:

> I was self-employed for 30 years and was used to running my business to my satisfaction. Working with four other individuals for consensus is very different. We need to work together, [so] there is a great need for us to get leadership training. (P7)

Experience

Many of the participants expressed experience working in county government as a factor in their decision to apply for the CCLA program (P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, & P11). Participant P3 felt he came into the program with a certain level of leadership development, which he credits to his level of experience prior to the program. Participant P5 conveyed he did not initially apply to be a part of the first class because he "thought he could gain some more experience." Participant P5 also said:

> When I ran for this job, I got a book from the county judge's office that explained in very general terms how we do our job and what we can and can't do. But it's like dipping your toe in the pool and then jumping in and saying, 'oh my gosh.' (P5)

Participant P6 expressed his opinion that going through the academy during one's first term "might not be as beneficial because you're going to understand everything about county government," and therefore the academy "may be more beneficial to someone who has a better understanding of their job." Participant P6 went through the CCLA program after spending 15 years working in the commissioners court.

"The impact [of the academy] should grow with your second or third term of office…First term folks may not have as deep of an understanding of county government service to get what they need out of the program," said commissioner P6. Participants P9 and P10 made similar statements. "I think you need to serve at least one term [in office] to see and understand what you're doing and why you're here…Having at least one term under your belt helps when you go through the program," said participant P9. Participants P10 and P11 were both in their third years of service when they entered the program. "I had just learned enough to be dangerous as far as knowing the workings of the county… I think you need some background [serving in the commissioner's position] to understand what you learn in the academy," said participant P10.

Participant P7 went through the academy in the first year of his second term, which he believes was "an ideal time" because he "had just been re-elected and had been in office long enough to get [his] feet on the ground." Participants P7 said the academy was more beneficial to his career because he was at an earlier stage in his career; however, both participants P7and P11 expressed they would have benefited from the academy had they went through the program later in their careers. "The pressure's off now—I could absorb more now from the leadership academy" said participant P7. In a similar respect, participant P8 expressed that the timing of when she went through the academy "definitely made a difference" in her career. Participant P8 was in her second year of office when she went through the program.

Cost

As a factor of their participation in the academy, participants described the cost

of the program in their responses. According to participant P11, former program director

Rick Avery purposely designed the program to cover two years so that commissioners

and judges could use two different yearly budgets to pay for program. The program's

cost was described as being based on the program's value and quality (P2, P6, & P9).

Participant P6 said, "I have yet to talk to anybody that hasn't' gotten their money's

worth from the academy, that hasn't received the full benefits and value." Similarly,

participant P9 said, "The cost is worth it—it's a great return of investment in terms of

time and money."

While participants described the cost of the program as reflective of the quality

of the program, participants also described the cost as a deterrent of program

participation. Participant P2 said the cost of the program was a "weakness" and could be

holding other commissioners back from applying because of their county budgets.

Participant P6 conveyed that he thought the academy's registration cost has "hampered

participation" along with the program's travel requirements. He said, "Texas is such a

large state—the travel required to be involved is a deterrent to some extent…I wish [the

Academy] was more in-demand…the cost does effect it some" (P6). Smaller counties

have had greater representation in the academy (P6). This may be because county

commissioners and judges of larger counties may not have the time available to devote

to the program (P6). Consequently, county leaders of rural counties are sometimes able

to participate in the program more so than county leaders of larger counties, that unless

their budgets hinder them from participating (P6). Participant P6 said, "When you're

dealing with our elected officials and you have a travel budget—there is not a portion for

leadership development." Some counties do allow the county court budget to cover the expense of the academy. The fact that participant P8's county budget paid for her program experience made a difference in her interest in applying to the program. Likewise, both participants P9 and P11 said their counties were able to pay for their participation in the academy; however, both participants know of other commissioners who represent smaller counties and cannot afford the program.

Participants expressed the need for scholarships for the program (P2, P6, P9, & P11). "It would be great to secure funding so that the cost to the individual could go down some," said participant P6.

Program Structure

The second theme to be discussed in this study's findings for question one is the theme of program structure. In their descriptions of the program and their experiences, participants described two general subthemes for program structure: program sessions and time.

Program sessions

When interviewing the participants, the researcher noted that participants described the program through their memories of the sessions they experienced. The sessions were discussed in terms of major highlights. For the purposes of describing the sessions from the participants' responses, the program sessions will be discussed by how participants' identified and differentiated the sessions: the "horse whisperer" session, the "media training" session, and the trips made to "DC", "Austin," and other states. The

topics were described as "relative and relevant to what [commissioners court members] do in the courthouse" (P9).

All 11 participants conveyed they enjoyed the horse whisperer session. Participant P11 said about the session, "I was amazed! I had never seen anything like it!" Nine of the 11 participants made statements about what they learned from this session in the program. Participant P9 thought the horse whisperer session "was about interpersonal relationships" and "relationships in general." Participant P10 conveyed the "horse trainer" taught the class "how to work with different individuals to communication and convey your ideas" and "how to find common ground." "Court can be difficult because you have four different individuals representing four different precincts who are not always thinking about the entire county…Everyone has different thoughts but we must work for the entire county," said participant P10.

The program session that addressed media training was discussed by participants P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P10. Participant P1 particularly enjoyed the "media expert" who taught about handling the media during times of crisis because she saw value in learning about crisis communication "even if you haven't had a reason to need it." Participant P2 also conveyed she "loved the media training," saying "It was very good…You learn how to 'couch' answers in interviews." Participant P3 echoed similar sentiments about the session. "I did enjoy dealing with the media; especially for in rural counties… The media can be a real tricky situation" (P3). Participant P5 said he "learned about having interviews from the media training." Participant P10 said that from the

media training session you learn how to "try to say what you want to say without putting a foot in your mouth and still get your point across."

In regards to the media session, two participants voiced some weaknesses. Participant P10 thought the media training session needed to incorporate more practice time. He said:

> Maybe if we had more role-playing—we had presentations and speaking exercises—but you have to learn, what with talking to the media and to court members, not to be too wordy and to be to the point and not lose your thought.
>
> (P10)

Similarly, participant P5 thought the media training session could have provided him more education than what it did. "The only weakness I saw—it's difficult to find that balance to see what you need and what you don't need. I think we could have had another day of [the media training] and gone deeper in some of that stuff," said participant P5.

Almost all of the participants described the sessions of the program that pertained to traveling opportunities, including the trips made to DC, a state near DC, and Austin, TX (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10 & P11). Participant P2 spoke to the comradery felt in her class when it came time for the trip to DC, saying, "In the last class we made the trip to DC—we fondly called it the Death March. We made t-shirts." Participants P4 and P5 both conveyed their trips to DC were their favorite sessions of the program because they were able to meet several senators. Participant P5 said the trip to DC allowed him to learn "about international things" and "visit some dignitaries." Echoing

similar enthusiasm for the session in DC, participant P7 conveyed the impact this trip made on him and said he "would not trade the DC trip for anything." About the DC trip participant P7 said, "It was outstanding… it opened our eyes to bigger things…It was a great experience."

Although several participants voiced positive descriptions of the program session in DC, two participants admitted some complaints about their experiences on the trip. Participant P8 conveyed she did not appreciate everything about her experience in DC. "Some of the stops in DC were not so beneficial…We went to an Israeli embassy [but] we could have spent more time doing other things…It wasn't really in my opinion what we were there for," said participant P8. When asked to describe any weaknesses he saw in the entire program, participant P9 said the "only weakness [he could] think of had to do with [his] trip to DC." Participant P9 conveyed physical health and stamina are both valuable and almost necessary to complete trip. "You really need to be in good shape to walk as much as you do," said participant P9.

While the participants were experiencing the program session in DC, they were also led to another county in a nearby state to learn more about county government in other states. Although what nearby states the participants traveled to varied from class to class, the participants shared similar experiences. Participant P2 described her experience traveling to a county in West Virginia. She said she was able to spend the day with their county government and learned their point of views for serving their county. "It's always good to look outside the box…take other perspectives into consideration," said participant P2. Participant P4 also conveyed he learned from the county leaders he

met in the state of Virginia. "One thing we did—we stopped at a parish in Virginia [during the DC trip]. I compared what they do to what we do, and I learned a lot," said participant P4. Participant P9 said his class was able to travel to the state of Maryland. "We have peers from across the country trying to do the same things we have to do," said participant P9. Participant P9 appreciated meeting "these folks" despite his initial doubts about meeting other county leaders from another state.

Several of the participants described their session trip to Austin in conjunction with their descriptions of the DC trip. Participant P3 said, "We had two sessions that I was most interested in—one was the Austin trip, the other was the trip to Washington. Those were the two sessions I was most interested in." Similarly, participant P11 conveyed that travelling to DC and Austin through the academy was "a great learning experience." Participant P4 mentioned the trip to Austin as a great experience, particularly because he was able to see representatives and leaders for his county that he already knew. Participant P5 said, "We learned about county government and state government when we went to Austin." Participant P5 appreciated learning more about how to work with Texas government as a county leader. Participant P10 conveyed that through the DC and Austin trips, the academy "gives you broader view of legislature and the 254 counties as a whole."

Through some of the participants' descriptions of the sessions, it was evident that they recognized the range of session topics as a program strength (P3, P4, P7, P9, P10, & P11). Participant P3 said, "All the sessions were good and varied." Participant P4 conveyed he was exposed to a "variety of sessions" that he thought might have been

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purposeful in the program's design in order to "give [the class] a better glimpse" of other perspectives. Participant P4 also noted that the variety of sessions meant that there was "nothing boring." Participant P7 said the program provided a "broad curriculum" over many subjects, saying, "The Academy tried to give us the well-rounded learning curve so we got a little of everything." Participant P9 described the many topics covered by the academy, including "teamwork, leadership, understanding issues, communication, seeing the big picture, [and] breaking down points," and said that he "took something from every event." Both participants P10 and P11 spoke to the broadness of the program. "The Academy better educates you to be better-rounded [and] see different perspectives" (P10). Participant P11 said, "It was a broad enough program—everyone can grow."

While participants recognized the variety of session topics as a strength to the program, they also described what they recognized as weaknesses of the program in terms of specific topics lacking in the program sessions (P2, P7, & P10). Participant P2 expressed that while the program teaches a lot about relationships and working with others, the program needs to "offer something to cover employer relationships," or working specifically with county government employees. Participant P7 made similar comments about the need to add a session topic focused on working with and trusting other county leaders and employees. Participant P7 said he thought the lack of this topic was a weakness to the program. In regards to the need for a session topic on trust, participant P7 said, "We have to learn how to present ideas in a way that builds consensus instead of causing division." Participant P2 also thought "it would have been

nice to have something on financial or budget issues," such as "accounting classes—something about numbers and dollars based." She said, "You can't address every department at the same time. You have to maintain balance to maintain employees" (P2). Participant P2 mentioned "emergency management" is another topic that needs to be covered in the program, saying, "We need programs to teach us to do the right things in these situations." Participant P10 conveyed that he and his fellow classmates have "expressed that [they would] really like to have more topics." Participant P10 also thought "a little more role-playing for conflict management" in the program would have benefited him.

Participants spoke to the weaknesses of the program by bringing up new ideas for program improvement. Participant P6 thought the academy's scope could be expanded to other departments in county government "such as the sheriff's office, tax collectors, auditors, or clerks." As another idea to incorporate in the program sessions, participant P11 conveyed that he thought the "older folks should come out and visit with the new class, maybe through some sort of meeting at the conferences once or twice a year."

Time

In participants' descriptions of the strengths and weaknesses in the CCLA program structure, the program's use of time was discussed in detail (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, & P9). Some participants discussed the program's spread of time, that being over the course of two years. Both participants P4 and P9 stated that the months of time in between each session allowed for the concepts to be built upon each other and reinforced; both participants thought the time in between was purposeful by design for

this effect. "I got to practice what I learned in the first session in between that class and the second session, and then that was reinforced again," said participant P4. Participant P6 expressed that the two-year program was a strength to the program because "it allowed you to be further engaged with others across the state over a longer period of time." However, participant P6 also acknowledged the two-year spread of the program to be a possible deterrent for some commissioners and judges who are considering the program. "I think it is difficult to get folks to commit to a two year program, but then again you are able to get folks who are more committed to their job that way," said participant P6.

Participant P9 recognized the academy worked well with the county court's typical calendar, saying the sessions were scheduled during "not-so-busy times" for commissioners and judges to meet while avoiding busier times of the year. Participant P9 admitted to being intimidated at first by the size of the materials provided by the program and having wondered if the program could be done in a more condensed manner, saying:

> When you first get the notebook…it appears as large and thick as some of the county budgets! Then you see it's spread out over the course of two years and you can't help but think, 'Can't we get this wrapped up in a couple of hours?' (P9)

Participants also described the time constraints of the academy as weaknesses to the program. Participant P1 identified the "time limit" as a weakness to the program, saying she thought the "program should have been extended" and "some presentations

should have been longer." Participant P5 expressed that "it would have been beneficial to spend a little more time" practicing public speaking because he admittedly struggles with public speaking. However, participant P5 also spoke to understanding the need for time balance in the program and the fact that everyone's schedules may not allow for more days of the program. Participant P6 made very similar comments, saying he wished "there could have been more" to the program. Participant P6 said, "I think it would have been to our benefit to have met more;" although, he admitted he was not sure if this was possible due to schedule constraints of participants.

While describing the time constraints of the program, participants recognized the lack of further engagement opportunities in the academy. Participant P1 said, "There has not been any [opportunities] to engage with, and so I have not stayed involved with the program since." Participant P2 identified the lack of "next level" components to the program as a "weakness of the program." She said, "It grieved me that there were not any more classes offered…Once you go through [the program], there's nothing left for you…There should have been a third step…They should have figured out something else for us to do" (P2).

Program Execution

The third theme to be discussed in this study's findings for question one is the theme of program execution. In their descriptions of the program, participants described

the execution of the program through two areas. These areas will be discussed as subthemes and are as follows: objectives met and success factors.

Objectives met

As stated in chapter one of this study, the CCLA program lists four objectives that guide the program. These objectives include:

- To increase knowledge of the origins and varying systems of county government and the interrelationship of local, state and national government systems.

- To develop communication and interpersonal skills to more effectively present ideas and work with community members, colleagues, the media and other elected officials.

- To enhance personal leadership and decision making skills to better represent and lead constituents, counties and associations.

- To improve the ability to serve as an advocate for county issues at all levels of government (Texas AgriLife Extension, n.d.).

Participants described what they thought the objectives of the program were with some accuracy (P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, & P11). Participant P4 generally described all of the objectives for the program. He described objective four most accurately when he said the program taught him "how we can all serve in the county we are in and serve in county government well" (P4). Participant P4 said the program helps in two ways, "1. you're helping that individual become a better leader, and 2. you're helping that county government." Participant P5 recognized the program as increasing knowledge on all

levels of government, which is reflected in objective one of the program. Similarly, participant P6 said, "The goals of the academy to me were to not only bring other county leaders together for their individual growth but also to grow together as leaders and lead Texas." Participant P6 also thought that one of the goals of the program is to "continually grow leadership for the state—to develop leaders who might possibly move on to other areas of government." He said, "I think we need to develop and train and assist others to become the leaders our state needs and the leaders who can serve our counties" (P6). Participant P7 also spoke to objective one of the program, saying, "The Academy was trying to prepare us to do a better job through leadership training…It gave us a globalized look at leadership. [The Academy] opens your eyes beyond 'your desk'…it helps you get the 'big picture.'" Participant P8 thought, "the objectives of the academy were probably two-fold. The first was probably to help develop leadership skills of those attending the academy, and the second was the networking aspect." The academy was also described as "about giving us a bigger picture of legislature" (P10). "The Academy was about personal development and growth and confidence building. They did a lot of that in the first class," said participant P11.

Success factors

Participants described several factors for why the program was and was not successful at meeting its objectives. The program was described as successful because it was "well organized," "well implemented," "well planned," and "well executed" (P1, P4). Program speakers were also "well trained," "well prepared," "professional," and "knowledgeable" (P1). Participants P9 and P10 both said the speakers were

"outstanding." "You could tell [the speakers] wanted to be there," said participant P9. Participant P2 said, "The quality of the program was what made it successful." Participant P5 said, "The strength of the program [lies in that] it hit the high spots to prepare you for the leadership role that you have." "Many things were done well…every single meeting," was described as beneficial to participant P6.

Participant P3 acknowledged that "the success of a program like this will always be varied from class to class." One or two of participant P4's classmates were not reelected during his class, and the individuals' "enthusiasm or lack thereof" was evident and affected the program experience. Participant P4 said he thought whether the participants had higher aspirations made a difference in how they received and grew in the program. "I had aspirations of going on and moving forward in my career as maybe becoming a judge one day… Others [in my class] were content in their position as commissioner…And for others, it was just a job," said participant P4. Participants P5 and P7 also spoke to the influence of their fellow classmates on the success of the program. "I learned from everyone else as much as I learned from the academy," said participant P5. Participant P7 said he "couldn't help but come away a better person after spending all that time with so many quality leaders. This is a very strong part of the Academy."

Many of the participants acknowledged the director of their class as an influential factor in the success of the program (P3, P4, P10, & P11). Participant P3 said, "Rick Avery was a very good director. He had a good vision of what this program could be. He had a strong curriculum. It was well organized, and sessions were meaningful and

interesting." Similarly, participant P4 said, "Rick Avery led [the program] well."

According to participant P10, "The entire course was so well designed. Rick Avery

constantly asked us about the relevancy of the courses to us. I feel like that was one of

the strengths, the constant improvement."

Class characteristics were described as particularly significant to the program's

success. The small size of each class was described as a success factor for the program.

Participant P10 said, "The group was small enough to interact with each other…it wasn't

so large that you would otherwise get lost." The participants described their classes as

including a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and county size representations (P3,

P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, & P11). Participant P4 enjoyed learning from others not like

himself and said everyone in his class contributed to "a new knowledge." "I got

acquainted with professionals and county leaders from other counties. That's an

important aspect of the program—getting a group of individuals not like you," said

participant P4. Likewise, participant P5 said he learned "from everyone else as much as

[he] learned from the academy." Participant P7 described the benefits of having different

perspectives in his class:

> We learned more talking in the halls to each other than we did in the sessions….
>
> The content that we covered over the course of the Academy caused discussions
>
> between ourselves that helped in the learning process, a kind of multiplier effect.
>
> (P7)

Program learning was enhanced because of the diversity of the group (P8).

"Getting to meet everybody in that class—we learned that we all do things differently,

said participant P8. Participant P6 spoke of a fellow classmate that deals with hurricanes in her county, a phenomenon he does not have to deal with at all. He appreciated "hearing different perspectives" from others in other regions like south Texas, west Texas, and northeast Texas" (P6). "The problems we face are the same—it's the aspects that create the problem that are different," said participant P6. The size of the class made a difference in the program's success (P10). "The group was small enough to interact with each other…It wasn't so large that you would otherwise get lost," said participant P10.

According to participant P3, there was a "variety of skillsets" in his class. Classes are also diverse "in ages, which works very well," (P11). Different levels of experiences were described as positive contributors to the success of the program. Participant P4 said the different levels of experiences in his class caused his classmates to get different lessons from the program. For example, participant P4 said the "horse whisperer" was "great" for some of his classmates, but "for others, it just wasn't their cup of tea" and was not as beneficial. Participant P10 conveyed that some of the people in his class had "30 years or more of experience;" he found it "valuable to learn from their experiences."

What Are Some Examples Of Impacts From The CCLA Program?

To answer question two of this study, the following themes emerged from the data: Affective Outcomes, Behavioral Outcomes, and Cognitive Outcomes. The researcher describes "Affective Outcomes" as those outcomes identified in the findings that showed changes or emphasis in participants' emotions and outlook from completing the program. The researcher describes "Behavioral Outcomes" as the outcomes

identified in the findings that demonstrated changes in participants' behaviors after completing the program. Lastly, the researcher describes "Cognitive Outcomes" as those outcomes identified in the findings that indicated participants' new knowledge or understanding upon completing the program. These three themes were also divided into subthemes for greater depth of discussion and understanding.

Affective Outcomes

It was evident that participants' enthusiasm for the academy is an affective outcome of the program. Participants conveyed many positive emotions about the program. Participant P1 said that upon graduating from the program, both she and her classmates "had this energy to use what tools [they] had been given and seek more." Participant P2 said to the researcher about her positive remarks of the program, "There's nothing I haven't told you that I haven't told 20,000 people." Both participants P4 and P7 expressed the importance of the academy and its need to continue to provide education for future county commissioners and judges. Participant P7 recognized Texas A&M University's role in the academy and appreciated "the university for providing" it. Participant P6 said, "I am passionate about [the academy] because I believe in it." Participant P9 conveyed he couldn't "say enough good things" about the academy.

A change in participants' confidence levels was another clear affective outcome from program participation. Participant P1 expressed that she is now "more comfortable expressing [her] issues and concerns" in the context of her job. Participant P5 made

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several statements regarding the confidence he gained from the academy. Since going through the academy, participant P5 has gained a lot of confidence in" himself.

[The academy] helped build my confidence as a speaker and a leader—especially with working with three levels of government...I now ask more of the not-so-obvious questions. I don't take things at the surface. I sometimes play the devil's advocate. (P5)

Participant P7 shared a story about gaining the confidence to skydive after going through the program:

During our academy [class], I made a comment during a social hour that one of the things I always wanted to do was skydive. [A fellow classmate] said she had done a tandem jump and that we should do that after graduation from the academy. So, the day after graduation, we played golf in the morning and then a small group of us met at Aggieland Skydive and jumped. Leadership Academy and skydiving, two great experiences, and I treasure them both. (P7)

As an affective outcome of the program, all of the participants conveyed a desire to be engaged in the program in the future if the opportunity was made available. As one form of future engagement, participants desire to volunteer and serve future classes (P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, & P11). Several of the participants expressed interest in volunteering as speakers for program sessions (P3, P6, P9, P10, & P11). Participant P3 said, "I've got 20 years of experience and I'd be willing to share that on a range of topics." Some concerns were expressed in accompaniment with participants' desire to be a part of the program in the future. Participant P11 voiced that he thought "older folks should come out and visit with the new class…maybe through some sort of meeting

maybe at the conferences once or twice a year" in order to "talk to the new folks." Participants P1, P4, and P6 all made statements about time and feasibility being factors in whether they could be involved with the program in the future. Participant P4 said about volunteering in the program, "All of us like to serve in some capacity, but do we have time? I have the time, but others may not." Similarly, participant P6 said, "If I was 35-40 years old, I'd seek much more involvement…My involvement is limited because of my age and time in office."

Participants also expressed interest in follow-up or next-level program opportunities for those who have been through the academy (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, & P11). As participant P5 stated, "This is a great program, but it leaves you thirsty for more." Participant P2 said, "Within a heartbeat, I'd participate in another program." Participant P4 compared the benefits of going through a second level of the program to those of someone with a bachelor's degree who wants to continue in a masters program. Participant P7 said she "would be pleased to do another round of the leadership academy—an advanced program maybe…that [would] touch on [her] ability to work with others." Likewise, participant P11 thought team-building exercises would be great for the focus of a second-level program course. Ideas for another part of the program for graduates included "a follow-up annual event or class or conference" (P1), an "inspirational speech" (P5), a "two-day event" with a focus on problem-solving or "something hands-on" (P5), or an additional piece to one of the other Texas county conferences (P5). Participant P11 conveyed that a "follow-up" is needed for recent class

graduates to be asked "How are you doing?" and "How are you using what you learned?"

The participants also mentioned the idea of a program reunion as a form of future engagement in the academy (P4, P6, P8, P10, & P11). Participant P6 said, "One thing I have talked about with my classmates is that we wish there were more alumni type meetings…not only to reminisce but also to stay connected more and continue to be a part of the program." Similarly, participant P8 remarked that she "would love to see reunions happen for the classes to mix and mingle again." Participant P11 expressed he would love to see his fellow classmates in a relaxed setting, saying "You know, you're meeting folks in a pretty intense time frame, folks of different counties. We go to all these meetings and see each other. We need the opportunity to spend time with each other." Participant P4 said he thought a reunion for the program could easily be incorporated as part of one of the association conferences.

Participant P9 conveyed that the academy helped him gain "an appreciation for our country and government." In regards to this new appreciation he said:
You know we hear the news and watch the news—we're quick to judge national issues—but having gone to DC and see what goes on—but having walked through Arlington Cemetery and seeing those who have died for our country [while in DC with

the program]—we know people are free to express different opinions, and our country is big enough for those different opinions" (P9).

Behavioral Outcomes

Participants reported having sought out and received other leadership positions as a result of going through the program. Participant P1 said, "Since the class, I've taken on even more leadership roles." Two of the leadership roles that participant P1 said she received "because of the program" was the State Affairs-Vice Chair and Secretary of Election & Credentials for Texas Silver-Haired Legislature. Since graduating from the academy, participant P4 now works "a lot with the West Texas association and state association." Participant P5 credits the academy for providing him with the leadership and confidence to "throw his hat in the running" for a county association officer position at the state level. He also mentioned that serving "as the president in 2012-2013 for the [region] Texas Association" (P5) was a result of going through the program. Upon graduating from the academy, participant P6 said he has served as a leading officer for four different associations tied to county government as well as in other leadership positions outside of government. Participant P11 said, "I've seen the growth of other commissioners who were new to [county government] when they entered the Academy and have now went on to become presidents of our associations and have really gotten involved."

Participants testified to having worked better with others since going through the program (P1, P2, P4, P7, P8, P9, & P10). Participant P2 said that what she learned from the academy has helped her as she has dealt with constituents. Participant P2 conveyed

that halfway through her program experience she was able to begin using what she learned about relationships to "deal with other members of the court." She said about her fellow court members, "If I hadn't went through the course, we would have killed each other" (P2). Participant P10 said he learned how to "show [court members] the benefits [to his point]" and "get their ground." Participant P8 still keeps her academy notebook intact to refer back to notes on a "fairly regular basis." She conveyed that she has used her notes to look up information about dealing with different personality types (P8). Participant P9 said that because of the program he is now able to communicate and work with others who see things differently than him. He also conveyed that he learned how to "be more patient in working through problems" and to "not getting red-faced but staying calm" from the program.

Participant P10 recalled a story about "a confrontation with a constituent" in which an article was written about himself by the constituent and printed in the county newspaper. Participant P10 conveyed that he "took that [article written about him] to [his academy] class and asked them how they would respond." Participant P10 also explained that this took place during his campaign for his second term. He said his classmates were able to give him advice on how he should respond and proceed.

Since completing the program, participants expressed a change in their interview skills (P1, P2, P7, P8, P9, & P10). Participant P1 said the program made her "more conscientious of [her] statements." "I strive to speak with clarity because I now know how important it is to speaking with professionals" (P1). Participant P9 told a story about being interviewed previously. He said he was able to stay focused because of his

focus on the notes from the academy session "even though the interviewer kept trying to get [him] off track." Participant P9 said, "That class really helped me with getting my thoughts together and stay focused…Every time I'm interviewed I go back to my core statements on public service and public safety." Participant P10 told a similar story, saying, "We've had some issues in our county where I had to be interviewed…[Because of the academy] I learned some tools to deal with the media." Participant P10 conveyed that he has "reflected back" on notes from the academy to help him with interviews. "The handouts we received [from the program] were beneficial. The media training handouts I've referred back to for guidelines in writing articles" (P10).

As an artifact representing the impacts of the media training session, participant P9 gave the researcher a web link to an interview that was conducted and aired after he completed the CCLA program. He said the following about the interview:

The reporter wanted to interview me on why [county name] spent almost $600,000 in association dues. I knew that this could be a tough interview, so I reflected on [the CCLA program's session on] media training and developed my "Key Message" before he arrived. Before the camera was turned on, I explained in detail that we had only spent $127,000 in association dues, not $600,000. The reporter then shifted to the real reason he wanted to talk to me on camera…tax funded Lobbyist. He grilled me for 45 minutes on the subject and it was by far, the most difficult interview that I have ever had. I was not prepared for this line of questions, but I continued to try and remain focused. Thirty minutes into the interview, the reporter actually became angry with my responses to his questions

because I would not deviate from my key message. Although I am not pleased

with the outcome, it could have been much worse had I not had the media

training that VG Young provided in the Leadership Academy. (P9)

Participants testified to having encouraged other county commissioners and

judges to apply for the CCLA program (P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, & P9). Participant P5

conveyed that he has encouraged a fellow county court member to apply for the

program. Participant P6 has also encouraged others to go through the academy.

Participant P6 conveyed the knowledge that the academy does not always have full

classes. "[The academy] should have a waiting line… people should have a desire to

grow in their leadership and grow professionally" (P6). Participant P6 also said he has

worked on the obtainment of scholarship funding to help members of his county

association pay for the program registration. Participant P7 recommended the program to

his brother, who serves as a county commissioner in another county and is now in the

current class of the academy.

Cognitive Outcomes

As a result of the program, participants reported several cognitive outcomes,

including an increased knowledge of government at the county, state, and federal levels

(P2, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10, & P11). Participant P5 said the academy taught him things

about "how the dominos fall from the top down" in regards to how "legislature's

actions" lead to "reactions in the county." Meeting different legislators through the

academy was described as educational for how to be involved at state level (P10).

Just as participants reported behavioral outcomes from the program including working with others more efficiently, participants also expressed an increased cognitive knowledge of personalities and relationships (P1, P2, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, & P11). Participant P2 said the lessons on personalities "allowed [her] to see the others in the program, and to see other commissioners." Similarly, participant P11 said the lessons on personalities helped him work better with others serving with him on the commissioners court. Participant P10 said he learned about "conflict management" from the academy. "You need [conflict management] in the commissioner's job because you deal with conflict a lot…You're working with other commissioners on the court and you have to work through differences of opinion" (P10).

Participants described many of the cognitive lessons about relationships and personalities as being learned from the horse whisperer. Participant P2 said she learned about body language from the horse whisperer. Participant P4 said the horse whisperer session taught him "how we can relate to different perspectives and relate to different constituents." Similarly, participant P6 found the horse whisperer session to be interesting and beneficial, saying "It really brought out the aspect of dealing with different personalities [and] how we have to lead different people in different ways. "[The horse whisperer session] really focused us on how to see the differences in people." Participant P8 said she "learned so much" from the horse whisperer session "You learn when to pick your battles, when to apply patience, when to apply

pressure…It taught you how to bring out the strengths of others and not harp on the weaknesses" (P8).

Overarching Outcome: Networking And Relationships

Participants claimed an increased network of relationships as a positive outcome of the program (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, & P11). This outcome was recognized as an overarching theme that influenced the affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes identified in this study. Participant P1 said she gained a "lifelong engagement with other counties." She said, "When I go to conferences, I feel like I got big brothers watching out for me" (P1). A fellow classmate from the program gave participant P1 a wreath that hangs in her office currently. "The friendships we made from the program are still going on [today]," said participant P2. According to participant P6, there is "a the circle of people you work with" and "to be able to grow you have to expand your circle of influence." Participant P6 called upon friends from the program when he ran for office again. "The building of relationships and a network is important…There's not way to quantify it… Life itself is based on relationships," said participant P6.

Participant P7 said he still talks to his classmates about his "personal life" and "county life." "The individuals I went through the Academy with are very special to me… We formed a special bond," said participant P7. Participant P8 remains "very close to [her] classmates," calling them regularly to ask about their perspectives. She thinks this is "one of the things that has made [the academy] so rewarding" (P8). "The networking was the most valuable part of the academy," said participant P8. When

participant P9 was charged with putting together a panel for a V.G. Young conference, he "called upon some of [his] classmates to serve on the panel." Participant P10 said, "I got to know other commissioners [through the academy]… It's like a homecoming every time we meet!" Participant P10 told a story about calling upon a fellow classmate who had experience dealing with "unit road systems" in her county. He said, "Her perspective was very helpful" when the same road system was implemented in his county during his second term.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the CCLA program, identify impacts of the program, and determine ways to improve the program. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

Question 1. How do CCLA graduates describe the program and their experiences in the program?

Question 2. What are some of the impacts from the CCLA program?

The methods used in this study do not allow for the findings to be generalized to other leadership development programs. However, the findings do provide insight as to how participants describe a specific leadership development program and its outcomes.

This was a descriptive study that was conducted to fill the gap in the literature as it pertains to agricultural leadership development programs. In addition, the outcomes and impacts of an agricultural leadership development program were discussed.

Discussion Of Findings

The findings of the study will be discussed in two sections so as to address both of the research questions and to conduct a formative and summative evaluation of the CCL program.

How Do CCLA Graduates Describe The Program And Their Experiences In The Program?

Through the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the CCLA program is

described by participants in three ways: factors for why participants in the study applied and participated in the CCLA program, aspects of the CCLA program's structure, and how the CCLA program was executed. A formative evaluation of the program will occur as the findings for question one of the study are discussed.

In regards to program participation factors, it is concluded from the findings that a variety of factors influence participants' decision to go through the academy. These factors include advertisement efforts from the program, recommendations from peers and the former program director, personal values of education, service, and leadership, the amount of experience had in county government, and the cost of the program. From what is understood about adult learning, the findings are in congruence with how adults are most motivated to learn. The intrinsic nature of personal values are predictable motivators for adult learners according to the assumptions of adult learning (Knowles et al., 2011). Also, considering the role that experience plays in adult learning, it is understandable why participants would consider their own self-evaluated level of experience before applying for the CCLA program. Adult learners identify themselves by their experiences and enter educational activities with their understanding of their own experiences, and therefore participants would evaluate themselves in a similar manner prior to deciding to apply for the program.

In regards to program structure, it is concluded from the findings that the program sessions have many strengths. These strengths include effective speakers and relevant topics. Participants positively described the horse whisperer session and admitted several cognitive and behavioral outcomes from this session. Participants also

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positively described the media training session and admitted behavioral outcomes from this session. However, participants also recommended for the media training session to be expanded upon for greater learning. Participants generally described the sessions that involved travel to Washington, DC, another state, and Austin, TX as positive learning experiences. While the travels to DC and the other state took place in a different session of the program than the trip to Austin, the travels were described together in the participants' responses. It is concluded that the two different sessions were described together because the outcomes of both sessions were similar for participants. From a constructivist's perspective, it would make sense that participants constructed their own understanding of their travel experiences in the program by the derived outcomes and similarities of these experiences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The variety and diversity of the session topics was also described as a strength of the CCLA program's structure. Participants also recommended a few additional topics and ideas to improve the program.

Participants also described the CCLA program's use of time as part of the program structure. The two-year spread of the program was described as a strength of the program. Also, the timing of sessions was also credited as a strength because it complements the annual working calendars of Texas county commissioners and judges. However, participants voiced wanting more from the academy, saying both the session's time constraints and lack of follow-up or future engagement opportunities are weaknesses of the program. This finding aligns with what is assumed about adult learners; adult learners' readiness to learn is tied to their desire to move into another

stage of development (Knowles et al., 2011). Participants desire a follow-up or second-level of the program because they are ready to learn and grow in another stage of development.

In regards to program execution, it is concluded from the findings that the program does meet all of its objectives and participants are able to describe these objectives based on their experiences in the program. It is also concluded that several factors contribute to the program's success at executing its objectives, including quality speakers, participants' enthusiasm and passion for their jobs, former director Rick Avery, the organization of the program, and group characteristics. Participants discussed the class's characteristics most of all as a success factor in the program's execution. Class characteristics were described as program strengths because they included a diverse range of backgrounds and experience levels. Participants' understanding of class characteristics as a program strength supports the social learning process (Bandura, 1986; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) and the role of learners' experiences in the adult learning process (Knowles et al., 2011). The socialization and relationships formed from the program strengthen the learning process for participants, as does the wide variety of experiences that are shared through the process. The relatively small size of the class was also mentioned as a positive factor in the program's execution.

What Are Some Examples Of Impacts From The CCLA Program?

Through the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the impacts of the CCLA program can be described in four ways: affective outcomes, behavioral outcomes, cognitive outcomes, and an overarching outcome of networking and relationships. A

summative evaluation of the program will occur as the findings for question two of the study are discussed. As explained in the conceptual framework for this study, the program outcomes are in relationship with the program structure, which exemplifies the review of adult learning and leadership development theories described in chapter two.

Participants described several affective outcomes from participating in the academy. Affective outcomes were described as those outcomes that showed changes or emphasis in participants' emotions and outlook from completing the program. The affective outcomes identified in the findings were: greater enthusiasm for the program, an increase in confidence, and a desire for future engagement in the academy. Participants described future engagement possibilities to include volunteering to serve the program, learning more from the program in a follow-up or second-level course, or attending a reunion for the program's graduates. The affective outcomes identified in the findings align with the humanist orientation to learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Internal changes in attitudes, beliefs, and self-perception can all be a part of one's development as a whole person. Participants' descriptions of future engagement possibilities also resemble actions associated with the three highest levels of Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs: belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. For example, participants' desire to engage in reunions with graduates demonstrates their motivation to belong with their fellow classmates. Participants' desire to engage in higher levels of learning in the program may represent their motivation for esteem in their knowledge.

Also, participants' desire to engage in service could be linked to their self-actualization as servant leaders in their communities and within the program.

Participants described several behavioral outcomes from participating in the academy. Behavioral outcomes were described as outcomes that demonstrated changes in participants' behaviors after completing the program. The behavioral outcomes identified in the findings include: having sought out and received other leadership positions, working more efficiently with others, better interview skills, and having encouraged others to apply for the program. The behavioral outcomes identified in the findings closely align with the behaviorist orientation to learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The identified behavioral outcomes are all observable manifestations of what was learned from the program. Also, the behavioral outcomes are outcomes that have reoccurred since the program and can be repeated in the future, thereby reinforcing the behavioral learning. The changes in participants' behaviors are indication of the program's external role in participants' learning processes.

Participants described several cognitive outcomes from participating in the academy. Cognitive outcomes were described as those outcomes that indicated participants' new knowledge or understanding upon completing the program. The cognitive outcomes identified in the findings are: a better understanding of government at all levels and a greater understanding of different personalities. The cognitive outcomes identified in the findings closely align with the cognitive orientation to learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The identified cognitive outcomes required

participants to process, remember, and perceive information provided by the program. These actions are all characteristic of cognitive learning.

The discussion of the differences and relationship between espoused theories of action and theories-in-use (Argyris, 1976; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Senge, 1992) can help with understanding the relationship between the identified affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes of the CCLA program. Whereas the affective and cognitive outcomes that participants' reported can be understood as espoused theories of action, the behavioral outcomes of the study can be understood as theories-in-use. For example, participants' cognitive program outcome of understanding personalities may have influenced participants' behavioral program outcome of working with others better. Likewise, participants' affective program outcome of increased confidence may have influenced participants' behavioral program outcome of seeking and receiving other leadership positions.

The findings also reflect the emergence of an overarching outcome of the program that influences the affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes of the program. Participants richly described the impact of a gained network of relationships as a result of participating in the academy. This network was described as beneficial to both the participants' careers and personal lives. This finding aligns with the social learning orientation to learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This finding as an overarching outcome also supports what is understood about social capital as a result of leadership development programming (Terroin, 2006; Van De Valk & Constas, 2011). Although Van De Valk and Constas (2011) were unable to establish a causal relationship between

leadership development programs and social capital, Van De Valk (2008) and Gopee

(2002) recognize the importance of social capital as it pertains to the purposes of adult

leadership development programs. The overarching outcome identified as a gained social

network has implications for leadership growth and learning beyond the CCLA program.

Terroin's (2006) conclusions about the impact of social capital on individuals who have

completed leadership programs support this identified and overarching outcome.

Recommendations For Further Research

The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for several other studies to

come. While this study sought to answer two specific research questions, there are other

questions that have emerged from the study that cannot be answered by the study's

findings.

One of the questions that emerged from the findings yet this study leaves

unanswered is the question of what form(s) of future engagement should be organized by

the program for its graduates. The researcher recommends for the program director to

initiate a survey study to send to program graduates to determine their interest in

different possibilities for future engagement. This study found that participants conveyed

general interest in future engagement and also suggested possibilities such as

opportunities to volunteer in the program, attending an organized reunion, or a follow-up

or second-level program. These possibilities should be included in a research study to

determine program graduates' interests in each.

Another research question that emerged from this study is the question of how do

program outcomes relate to the program's curriculum. The researcher recommends

building on the findings of this study through additional research focused on analyzing the curriculum of the academy using leadership development theories. Although participants in this study were able to describe strengths and weaknesses of the program's sessions as well as outcomes of going through the program, the participants were not asked to describe the program's curriculum or any specific theories or concepts taught in the program; thus, information about how the curriculum impacts graduates could not be readily assessed. The researcher is unable to evaluate the program's curriculum using the study's findings; however, the researcher is interested in knowing how the program's curriculum compares to current leadership development theories and approaches.

Further research should also be conducted using interviews with the former CCLA program director Rick Avery, the current program director Peter McGuill, and fellow county commissioners and judges who work with graduates of the program but have not gone through the program themselves. Although this study used self-reports of outcomes and impacts from the program, research shows that reports from second parties can enhance findings from self-reports of leadership development (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998; Atwater & Waldman, 1998). The current program director and former program director may have insight on other possible outcomes and impacts from the academy as well as possible testimonies to confirm this study's findings. Also, interviews with

coworkers of graduates may provide supporting evidence to confirm the participants'
self-reports of outcomes and impacts.

There are also related inquiries that could be explored through quantitative
methods. This study evaluated the CCLA program through the described experiences of
its participants. However, the CCLA program could benefit from being evaluated based
on its financial value for the state of Texas. According to Avolio, Avey, and Quisenberry
(2010), leadership training and development ought to consider the financial return on
investment as part of its evaluation of effectiveness. Determining the financial value of
the program can help to quantify the outcomes and findings of this study for CCLA
investors.

Recommendations For Practice

Although this study is not generalizable to other leadership development
programs, it is quite applicable for the purposes of the CCLA program. Based on the
findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher has a few recommendations for the
program to practice in the future. First, the researcher recommends for the program to
utilize graduates of the program to advertise and promote the program to potential
participants. This recommendation is based on the findings of the study that showed
participants found peer recommendations to be influential in their decision to apply for
the program.

The researcher also recommends for years of experience in county government to
be considered more in the application process for the academy than it is currently. This
recommendation is based on the findings of the study that showed participants found

some years of experience to help with their understanding of program sessions and application of learned concepts.

The program should also consider possible opportunities to utilize the networks of relationships formed through the academy. For example, the program outcome of networks may be instrumental for the mobilization of grassroots efforts in the state of Texas. Or, the highly developed relationships formed from the academy may be useful to researchers looking to study county leadership or social capital. Just as (2008) noted that there is a lack of research pertaining to social capital's influence in leadership development, the findings of this study could point researchers to opportunities to examine how CCLA social networks are enhancing leadership development in participants beyond the program.

Finally, the researcher recommends for the program to continue incorporating "the horse whisperer," the media training session, and the trips to Washington, DC, a state near DC, and Austin, TX, in the program structure. These were all positively described parts of the program and should not be done away with any time soon. The researcher does recommend for slight changes to be made to these sessions as described by the findings of this study. These recommendations include adding more meetings, expanding meeting sessions to allow for greater depth of learning, providing more opportunities for participants to practice learned skills, and considering the diversity of applicants' experiences when selecting new cohorts of classes as a whole, Also, the

program should continue to keep class sizes at smaller numbers and diversity as a central characteristic of program classes.

Recommendations For The Program Director

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recognizes several recommendations and words of advice for the current CCLA program director. Considering the fact that the current program director did not serve the population of this study, or the 54 graduates of the program, it would be highly recommended for the current program director to make efforts to develop relationships with the graduates. By connecting with the CCLA alumni network, the program director will increase the chances that alumni will continue to recommend the program to other commissioners court members. Also, the current program director could use this network of alumni to assist in enhancing the program. Based on the findings, it seems participants desire to have more opportunities to engage in the program, whether through service, reunions, or a second-level of the program. The current program could work with the graduates of this program to gain more ideas for what future engagement in the program could look like and to put these ideas into action. Lastly, the researcher recommends for the current CCLA program director to read this document and compare the described strengths, weaknesses, and impacts of the program with his understanding of the program.

Final Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the CCLA program, identify impacts of the program, and determine ways to improve the program. Through the collection and interpretation of participants' experiences in the CCLA program, the researcher was able

to assess the program's strengths and weaknesses, identify learning outcomes of the program, and recommend changes for program improvement. The methods of this study also included the collection of documents and records as artifacts of the program. Participants provided very few artifacts. The researcher was disappointed in the lack of documents provided. However, these documents supported the themes that were formed from the data analysis of the interview notes. The researcher made several recommendations for further research and practice based on the findings of this study. This study provides the CCLA program a more complete picture of the program's merits, deficiencies, impacts, and areas for improvement or change. It is the researcher's hope that the CCLA program may use the findings of this study to better serve Texas county commissioners and judges and thus develop better leaders and county servants for the state of Texas.

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