

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING FOR FIRST-YEAR
STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Jennifer Elizabeth Wilson Brown

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the leadership development experiences of first-year undergraduate students who participated in service learning. The central research question is: What are the shared leadership experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning activities during their first-year courses? Ten recent graduates from a large public research university in the Midwest make up the sample for this study. The theory guiding this study is Kolb's experiential learning theory as it aims to explore experiential leadership development through service-learning during first-year undergraduate studies. Data collection methods included a timeline and digital data collection, individual interviews, and focus groups. Data were analyzed through Moustakas's transcendental phenomenological process, revealing three themes, four subthemes, and one outlier. In addition to the study findings, limitations, implications for stakeholders, and recommendations for future research were presented.

Keywords: first-year students, service-learning, higher education, leadership, leadership development, civic engagement

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Dedication

To my parents, James and Karen, who walked alongside me and encouraged me in my education, thank you for helping me see what I could do. You never pushed ideals on me but instead, let me discover where my passion would lead me. Your support in my education has led to this and I am forever grateful.

To the memory of my grandmother, Margaret. You sought education in a world that did not always agree that women should be educated with advanced degrees and sought careers where men led the way. You were a changemaker and your influence continues to be a guiding light. Thank you for always believing in me and supporting the things I loved. I miss you but I know your memory lives on in my life.

To my in-laws, Steve and Peggy, thank you for always supporting and encouraging me. You joined me on this journey at the halfway way mark and never let me forget how proud you are of me. Thank you for your continued encouragement and for cheering me on along the way.

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To my daughter, Margie. You, little one, are a shining star. My love for you grows every day and I hope this reminds you that you can do anything you set your mind to. Others may doubt you or tell you your limitations, but you can do anything. Thank you for reminding me that I am strong when I feel weak and that what is important is worth fighting for.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the leadership experiences of alumni who completed an undergraduate program with a first-year service-learning component. Understanding that the development of leadership qualities and practices is significant for all undergraduate students, it is essential to research the product and needs of leadership courses for first-year students. Leadership development for undergraduate students tends to provide one course geared toward upper-division level students (Morgan, 2016; Romsa et al., 2017). This limited coursework in leadership development is not enough to provide students with a strong foundation of understanding of how to be effective leaders. Instead, researchers advocate for increased leadership development for undergraduate students (Romsa et al., 2017) and the use of service-learning (Snell et al., 2015a). This study sought to understand leadership development through incorporating service-learning in first-year programs by exploring the experiences of alumni who completed such coursework. This chapter explores relevant historical research, describes the problem statement, and shares the significance of the study. Within this chapter, the beginning details of the background of the study provide an overview of the historical, social, and theoretical context. The problem and purpose statements, the study's central research question, and sub-questions are also outlined. Definitions are provided for commonly used words throughout the manuscript; then the chapter concludes with a summary.

Background

Leadership skill development is traditionally reserved for upper-division courses during an undergraduate student's final year (Chen et al., 2018; Morgan, 2016). Yet various research continues to promote the need for leadership development and links leadership skills to the

practice of service-learning (Cress & Donahue, 2011, 2013; Fink, 2013). Taking time to review the background of leadership development of undergraduate students sheds light on the current research and the gaps that appear. Exploring the types of classes and opportunities available to students provides a beginning framework for understanding the existing types of leadership development opportunities and areas for future growth and focus. The historical, social, and theoretical contexts are explored to fully ascertain the background of undergraduate leadership development.

Historical Context

Historically, service-learning became prominent in the 1980's (Flecky & Gitlow, 2009; Jacoby, 2015) and has seen significant growth in the last few decades (Cress et al., 2001). Colleges and universities began with the goal of serving the community (Flecky & Gitlow, 2009). With the growth of the middle-class gaining access to higher education, institutions focused on meeting the community's needs on a regional and local level. In the 1980s, the growth of organizations like The National Campus Compact began linking the mission of institutions and students to the need for civic responsibility and participation in service-learning. The 1990s began a time in service-learning history when the growth of service organizations was significant, as was the desire to connect academic learning with local communities in service activities. The progression into the 2000s and 2010s resulted in significant growth of service-learning activities, partnerships, and connections from educational opportunities to real-world experiences. With the considerable development of service-learning in higher education, civic engagement pedagogy has entered its way into the K–12 system, allowing students entering higher education to already have experience with service-learning practices (Flecky & Gitlow,

2009). As universities continue to include service-learning in the classroom, some institutions allow service-learning activities to frame first-year experience programs (Jamelske, 2009).

Social Context

Socially, service-learning impacts students, institutions, and their communities. Providing students the opportunity to engage with service-learning can impact the jobs they hold, future careers, the people they work with, and the university (Cress et al., 2001). Students who engage with service-learning have the potential to become stronger leaders and develop their skills over the length of four years instead of in a shorter amount of time (Fink, 2013; Jacques et al., 2016). Service-learning is also socially significant because allowing students to engage within the communities in which they live and learn not only positively impacts the community itself but also brings a greater sense of civic responsibility and a desire to engage more with the community in the future (Cress et al., 2001). Students who engage with service-learning also express a stronger connection to their institution and a desire to give back after graduation (Kalkan et al., 2020).

Theoretical Context

Understanding the various theories related to service learning helps provide a deeper context of its creation. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory explores how reflection practices promote student learning development. It has been used to understand service learning, build reflection practices, and encourage a circle of continuous learning (Cress et al., 2010; Cress et al., 2013). Bass' and Steidlmeier's (1999) leadership development theory explores the four I's of transformational leadership, which directly impact service-learning and a student's ability to develop as a leader. It has been used to examine leadership styles (Witmer & Anderson, 1994) and guides students in strong leadership styles (Cherry, 2023; Witmer & Anderson, 1994). The

critical theory of Freire (1973) and Shor and Freire (1987) sheds light on the need for problem-solving, critiquing social systems, and the civic responsibility of education (Flecky & Gitlow, 2009). Service-learning theories have been used to teach students how to work together to solve problems during their service projects (Cress et al., 2010, 2013). Though these theories differ in their approaches, they underpin the service-learning field and highlight important constructs that have shaped modern-day service-learning practices.

Problem Statement

The problem is that undergraduate students are being insufficiently developed as leaders (Dick et al., 2021; Holmes et al., 2022) with a leadership development process that begins too late in their academic careers (Morgan, 2016; Salam et al., 2019). Although the leadership development of undergraduate students impacts their personal and civic commitment (Cress et al., 2001; Schalge et al., 2018) and professional future (Amagoh, 2009; Stock et al., 2017), leadership is often addressed as a single course late in the undergraduate student's degree (Chen et al., 2018; Weng & Yan, 2019). Service-learning is a leadership development strategy that promotes civically minded dispositions and individuals seeking to lead others positively (Damons & Dunbar-Krige, 2020; Skalicky et al., 2020). Although service-learning is a leadership development strategy that may work for undergraduate students and is offered in the first year by some institutions, the leadership experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning within their first year of study are not yet known.

Purpose Statement

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the leadership experiences of alumni who completed an undergraduate program with a first-year service-learning component. This study defined first-year service-learning component as community service activities (Cress

et al., 2013) within general study courses during the first year (Bowman & Holmes, 2017; Tinto, 2017) of undergraduate coursework. The theory guiding this study was the experiential learning theory by Kolb (1984), as it relates to the reflection practices that undergird service learning.

Significance of the Study

This study relates to those that come before it, exploring how leadership development has impacted undergraduate students. Specifically, this study examined first-year service-learning experiences and leadership development. The study's theoretical, empirical, and practical significance are explored below.

Theoretical

The theoretical significance of this study is that it corroborates the constructs of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, providing a framework for exploring the leadership development of first-year students utilizing service learning. This research uses influence from the work of Cress et al. (2013), whose research was grounded in Kolb's experiential learning theory, as well as the research of others who have contributed to the literature regarding the leadership development of undergraduate students (Chen et al., 2018; Odom et al., 2017). Cress et al. utilized reflective practices to allow students to draw connections between classroom learning and experiences during the service-learning components. Specifically, this study provides an understanding of how the concepts of experiential learning theory are reflected in leadership development through service learning.

Empirical

The empirical significance of this study is that it provides additional research and understanding of the leadership development of undergraduate students. This is significant as it allows for research in the area of first-year students, looking more specifically at leadership

development through service learning. Cress et al. (2013) addressed the significance of service-learning on general student development during undergraduate coursework but not specifically on the impact of leadership development gained by first-year students. Additionally, while the leadership development of upper-level students and graduating college students through service-learning has been explored (Chen et al., 2018; Romsa et al., 2017), a specific look at first-year experiences is still needed. The study aims to be empirically significant by filling this literature gap through the intersection of first-year learning experiences, leadership development, and service learning.

Practical

The practical significance of this study is that it influences the current institutional leadership development methods. It aids in developing leadership courses for first-year students and provide a strong foundation for beginning leadership development through service learning. Using aspects of service-learning lays the foundation for creating civically minded students who engage in their community (Cress et al., 2001). In turn, the students enter the workforce and are viewed as high-quality candidates, exemplifying leadership skills that will strengthen their companies (Amagoh, 2009; Stock et al., 2017). This research is essential for any university as it shows the potential growth of a student's leadership skills and provide institutions with a strategy to promote leadership development at the beginning of a college career. Should an institution implement service-learning for leadership development, it improves its relationship with the surrounding community and the character and leadership qualities of graduating students.

Research Questions

This study focused on the experiences of recent alumni who attended an institution that focused on service-learning throughout their undergraduate experience. It sought to understand

alumni's lived experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the significance of leadership development within the first year of a student's college career. The following central research question and subsequent questions guide this phenomenological study.

Central Research Question

What are the shared leadership experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning activities during their first-year courses?

Sub Question One

What are the active experimentation experiences of alumni who participated in first-year service-learning activities?

Sub Question Two

What are the reflection experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning activities in their first-year courses?

Definitions

The following terms and definitions provide a context for this study.

1. *Civic responsibility*—For this study, *civic responsibility* will refer to a student engaging with a service-learning site within the community and the connection they feel to what they are doing or where they are doing it (Cress et al., 2001).
2. *First-year*—For this study, *first-year* is used to describe a student in the first year of their undergraduate program (Bowman & Holmes, 2018; Tinto, 2017).
3. *Leadership*—Ward (2023) defined leadership as motivating a group of people to achieve a common goal. In this study, students will share the knowledge gained on being a leader and how their leadership skills have grown through participation in service-learning activities.

4. *Reflection*—Reflection is the process of reviewing lived experiences and relating them to what has been learned and allows for demonstration of growth within students (Cress et al., 2013). Within this study, students will share how reflection practices have shaped their view of service-learning and leadership qualities in their life.
5. *Service-learning*—Wolpert-Gawron (2016) explained that service-learning is students learning their program's standards or objectives through real-life situations. Students in this study will share the types of service-learning they have participated in and how they have impacted their life, leadership style, and future career goals.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership experiences of alumni who completed an undergraduate program with a first-year service-learning component. The problem is that undergraduate students are being insufficiently developed as leaders (Dick et al., 2021; Holmes et al., 2022) with a leadership development process that begins too late in their academic careers (Morgan, 2016; Salam et al., 2019; Snell et al., 2015a). The late-stage leadership development that does exist for undergraduate students typically consists of only a single course (Diamond, 2014; Romsa et al., 2017). Research shows that the leadership development of undergraduate students is significant for their personal and civic exploration, yet it continues to be researched only in the latter part of the educational sequence (Odom et al., 2014, 2017). By exploring the first-year leadership development experiences of recent alumni from a learning-focused institution, an understanding of alumni leadership development and career directive was assessed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the study's theoretical framework and related literature. Specifically, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory is explored, and then a review of relevant literature on leadership development in first-year general study courses and service learning are provided. Specifically, the related literature review includes (a) an understanding of leadership development; (b) leadership styles; (c) leadership development within higher education; (d) Service learning; and (e) first-year experience. After reviewing recent literature, the gap in the research that provides the focus of the study will be discussed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the foundation for the study. Specifically, experiential learning theory will serve as the lens through which the current study is approached. Inspiration for Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory was drawn from scholars whom he considered foundational in experiential learning, such as James, Lewin, Dewey, Rogers, and Follett (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). After a review of the work of these scholars, Kolb noticed a persistent theme among perspectives of the learning process, choosing the word experiential to describe what he continued to see. While Kolb's four constructs are concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, this study highlights two specific constructs which are explained in depth below.

Reflective Observation

The second construct of experiential learning theory is reflective observation. It occurs after concrete experience. Reflective observation allows individuals to process the concrete experience, followed by discussing the experience with others and asking any questions the

experience provoked (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). Kolb's (1984) model is a common practice in community-engaged pedagogy, with the cornerstone of service-learning being the reflection process (Cress et al., 2013; Jacoby, 2015). Allowing individuals to reflect on what they are learning, including the processes and experiences they engage in, encourages continued growth and learning. Instructors who promote reflection and questioning create a safe environment for growth for their students. It allows the students the opportunity to wrestle with materials and draw their conclusions on the learning within practical experiences they are given (Cress et al., 2013; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). Students who participate in this process have the art of reflection to guide their understanding and approach, further allowing their learning growth as students (Cress et al., 2013).

Active Experimentation

Active experimentation is the final phase of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, allowing individuals to go through a trial-and-error process. The emphasis is on practical application rather than reflective understanding or abstract conceptualization (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015; Petkus, 2000). Individuals can return to the service site and apply what they observed in reflection and the concepts they learned in preparation, exploring what ideals work at the service site. There is a risk assessment level within active experimentation, noting that some concepts may not be relevant in certain situations (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). Students are provided a safe environment to use active experimentation and learn what could work and what needs further adjustment (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015; Petkus, 2000).

In Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, students are taught in a classroom setting, which can be applied directly or indirectly at the service-learning site. Seeing what they have learned practically allows students to demonstrate their understanding of classroom knowledge.

After this application of knowledge, students are provided with prompts on their experiences. While using the reflection aspect of Kolb's theory, participants grow from what they have learned and what they have applied. This, in turn, generates more questions and a desire for growth in the students. This process is a continuous, constant cycle (Kolb et al., 2001). This theory allows for a deeper understanding that shows how participants grow in their understanding and depth of knowledge. Participants develop at their own pace in an environment that promotes questions and continued growth, which occurs intentionally in service-learning. The foundations of Kolb's theory will be used to foster an understanding of how service-learning components developed undergraduate students as leaders. This study specifically seeks to understand the reflective observation and active experimentation experiences of alumni who participated in first-year service-learning activities.

Related Literature

Service-learning involves students participating in service activities or working in their surrounding community. This work should relate to the learning that takes place within the classroom and is considered a type of experiential learning (Drinkard & Tontodonato, 2019; Griffith & Clark, 2016). Service-learning appeared in higher education in the 1980s and has grown exponentially over the last thirty years (Jacoby, 2015). Through service-learning activities, students begin understanding the community's needs, developing leadership skills, and developing a deeper understanding of their leadership skills (Lester, 2015). As they develop leadership skills through service-learning, students experience servant leadership and understand how their involvement meets the community's needs (Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Strawn et al., 2017). Traditionally, student leadership development occurs through on-campus leadership positions, such as resident advisors and student government (Peck & Callahan, 2019). These

positions provide ongoing opportunities for students to lead their peers. This aspect of leadership development is limited to the students who seek out on-campus opportunities. For the general student body, however, leadership development opportunities do not appear until they have already entered their content-specific courses and are geared toward providing career preparedness (Morgan, 2016; Romsa et al., 2017). While service-learning and leadership are essential in the growth of any student and later in their careers, the opportunities that allow the most growth in these areas are often reserved for students who are already well into their academic path. Having many levels of courses that provide service-learning components could provide leadership opportunities sooner for students and be more equitable (Cress et al., 2010).

Leadership Styles

Because this study looks at service-learning's impact on leadership development, a general understanding of leadership literature and theories is helpful. Leadership is extensively researched. It continues to be a topic of significant change. It is grounded in three main perspectives: "(i) leadership as a process or relationship, (ii) leadership as a combination of personality traits and characteristics, or (iii) leadership as certain behaviors or leadership skills" (Gandolfi & Stone, 2016, p. 218). Within these three main perspectives, many leadership styles have been established. The type of leadership style someone exhibits can determine the working relationship of employees and how someone relates to an organization (Veliu et al., 2017). When someone experiences a leadership style that promotes connection and working collaboratively, the led person is more likely to have a positive relationship with the leader, as opposed to a leadership style that conflicts with an individual's ideal working environment or promotes significant consequences for not completing work promptly (Gandolfi & Stone, 2016; Veliu et al., 2017).

Effective leadership styles mainly lie within the eye of those under the leader (Asghar & Oino, 2018; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2004; Gandolfi & Stone, 2018; Kalkan et al., 2020), making *effective leadership* a very subjective idea. When an individual is under a leader that demonstrates qualities that promote a collaborative team and work alongside their followers, the individual will have a greater connection to the organization and the group's mission (Asghar & Oino, 2018; Veliu et al., 2017). Yet it is essential to note that not all leadership styles will lead to a better organization (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). Leadership styles are also promoted within the university culture and relate to how students connect with others at the institution (Kalkan et al., 2020). There are many ways that leadership styles relate to individuals, both in working environments and academic institutions, noting that the following types are present in both environments: autocratic leadership, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, democratic leadership, and servant leadership.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership encourages leaders to do what they feel is necessary to reach a goal at the expense of their followers (Bhatti et al., 2012; De Cremer, 2006; Van Vugt et al., 2004). Though reaching a collective goal is a desired result, autocratic leaders do not take into consideration the needs and desires of their followers and assigns tasks without seeking input from others. With this leadership style followers find that the leader does not motivate the group, finding limited effectiveness within the group and a lack of stability, as well as feeling threatened or punished for mistakes. Many followers under an autocratic leader express frustration and anger, in addition to a feeling of unease at their jobs (Bhatti et al., 2012; De Cremer, 2006). Autocratic leadership is found more so in government settings worldwide, specifically in policymakers (Caillier, 2020). This type of leadership is demonstrated in service-learning when

students work with government officials, witnessing aspects of policymaking and demonstration of reaching a goal without considering the needs and desires of those within the organization (Bhatti et al., 2012; Caillier, 2020).

Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership is often seen as the opposite of autocratic leadership, inviting followers into the conversation on decisions and gaining input before making a final decision (Bhatti et al., 2012; Caillier, 2020; Van Vugt et al., 2004). Followers under a democratic leader find higher satisfaction in their work, seeking to put in quality effort and see the fruits of their labor pay off (Bhatti et al., 2012; Van Vugt et al., 2004). Leaders distribute workload and responsibilities to followers in an equitable manner (Caillier, 2020). Democratic leadership relates to service-learning in the ways it involves group decision making into the leadership styles. Students participating in service sites with a democratic leader will feel involved in the decisions that are made at the organization and an ownership in the project (Bhatti et al., 2012; Van Vugt et al., 2004).

Democratic and autocratic leadership is at opposite ends of the leadership spectrum, with other types of leadership styles falling within this scale (Caillier, 2020). The biggest distinction between these two styles is the type of involvement the followers have with group decisions and work distribution (Bhatti et al., 2012; Caillier, 2020; Van Vugt et al., 2004). It is significant to describe these two distinct styles of leadership to help lay a foundation for the leadership styles that are discussed below.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is best described as rewards-based leadership, meaning that it allows followers to gain a reward from the leader after the successful completion of a given task

or transaction (Kark et al., 2018; Khan, 2018; Kark et al., 2017). With this style, the central role of the leader is to present the goal and ensure it is obtained (Kalsoom et al., 2018). The relationship between the leader and followers is significantly impacted by how the leader presents their goal and the tasks required to complete (Kalsoom et al., 2018; Kark et al., 2018). In this leadership style and situation, the leader presents rewards for positive performance and consequences for negative performance. Within this relationship, followers complete tasks to gain a reward from the leader instead of receiving consequences for incomplete responsibilities (Alrowwad et al., 2019; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Bass, 2008; Kark et al., 2017).

Transactional leadership is best seen in an academic setting as an instructor giving grades to students for completing coursework (Azizah et al., 2020; Khan, 2017). Transactional leadership is found to prohibit creativity and risk-taking among its recipients (Kark et al., 2018). This can relate to service-learning when the instructor provides a reward or a consequence for students completing a service-learning assignment that involves strict requirements (e.g., providing a higher grade for active participation or a failing grade for poor involvement). Within transactional leadership, environmental factors are not considered when making decisions that can result in less desirable decisions (Khan, 2017). This is demonstrated in service learning when students are assigned sites in which they have little interest or do not relate to their classroom learning objective. Transactional leadership is closely tied to transformational leadership in expressing how the two styles differ (Azizah et al., 2020; Kalsoom et al., 2018; Kark et al., 2017; Khan, 2017).

Transformational Leadership

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) presented transformational leadership theory as a leader working alongside their team to identify problems and work towards solutions. It involves

empowering, influencing, encouraging intellectual stimulation, and considering each team member as an individual working towards the organization's good. These leaders want what is best for those under them, and to help their subordinates rise, they put their gain and growth second. Authentic transformational leadership holds idealized values that are sought after by many, seeking to meet their associates where they are, which allows them to create a foundation of commonality and collaboration instead of a hierarchy (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Cherry 2023). Their authenticity communicates that they genuinely care for those they lead, not just their gains.

Transformational leaders present issues to those under them in a way that shows the organization's direction and the need for everyone to work together to reach that goal and fulfill the mission (Cherry, 2023). Transformational leaders use the interest of the issues to persuade followers to join in a specific direction (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). One of service-learning's goals is to help the students see the organization's purpose and how their involvement helps contribute to or fit within the university's mission (Witmer & Anderson, 1994). The significance of transformational leadership in service-learning is understanding what a leader looks like, specifically one who is morally and ethically aware (Cherry, 2023; Witmer & Anderson, 1994). Through exploring various leadership types, students see how transformational and transactional leadership look in real-life settings. In demonstrating these leadership styles and helping students identify them, students understand the power they carry to engage and encourage others through their leadership instead of being a leader seeking personal gain.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership encourages the leader to join alongside their followers, put the needs of the followers above their own, and work together to reach the collective goal (Eva et al., 2018;

Jit et al., 2017; Letizia, 2014). Though leader and servant are opposite in definition, they work together to create a successful leadership style (Barnabas et al., 2010). These leaders are the ones who are eager to learn about what dreams and aspirations of those under their leadership and will work alongside everyone to achieve a task, regardless of a hierarchy (Eva et al., 2018). For servant leaders, it does not matter that the leader oversees the project and direction of the team; when a team member finds success, everyone succeeds (Barnabas et al., 2010; Eva et al., 2018; Letizia, 2014). Servant leaders also seek consistent feedback from members they oversee, looking to improve how the team works together (Lemoine et al., 2019; Letizia, 2014). This type of leadership is significant because it brings direct support from the leader to the followers. It shows how individuals are cared for as people, not just as employees achieving a goal, generally boosting employees' morale (Lemoine et al., 2019).

This type of leadership is significant in education and is commonly found in extracurricular activities, student leadership roles, and smaller classroom settings (Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Sahawneh & Benuto, 2018). Faculty and staff leading students can learn about their desires and the direction they aim to go in life, encouraging and supporting the students along the way (Jit et al., 2017; Norris et al., 2017; Sahawneh & Benuto, 2018). Specifically, in service-learning, servant leadership can be seen among instructors who join students at service sights and work alongside them to reach the collective goal (Eva et al., 2018).

While leadership styles have been explored to determine types of leadership, the proposed study will ask participants to consider how service-learning practices have influenced their leadership styles. As noted earlier, the types of leadership styles promoted within the culture of a university can directly relate to the connection a student feels to the institution (Kalkan et al., 2020) or even to an experience (Eva et al., 2018). The types of leadership

explored in this section demonstrated the differences in leadership styles that students may have experienced or developed during their service-learning experiences.

Leadership Development Strategies

After understanding various leadership styles, knowing how leadership development opportunities come about for individuals is essential. While leadership development opportunities begin at different stages of life for individuals (e.g., adolescent sports teams, leadership opportunities in primary school), it is essential that chances to develop as a leader continue within organizations and career settings (Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018). Establishing strategies for best leadership practices is crucial as it allows for growth within organizations and individuals (Amagoh, 2009; Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Stock et al., 2017). Leadership development also provides for systematic changes to take place to improve the quality of leadership (Amagoh, 2009).

For leadership development strategies to be successful, structure and systems must be in place to promote development (Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018). Best practices call for identifying the needs for leadership development and the best ways it will serve the population (Amagoh, 2009). It also includes determining the best delivery method of development courses and seeing that they fit the need, structure, and culture, either from in-person or online opportunities (Griffith et al., 2019; Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Stock et al., 2017). It is equally as important to distinguish the difference between leadership development and management development, understanding that leadership development allows for a broader sense, whereas management development can be seen as an extension of job training and aligning training towards company growth (Day, 2001; Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018). Further exploration of leadership development in corporate settings, online opportunities, and higher

education provides a deeper understanding of the structures and how leadership development promotes individual growth.

Leadership Development Programs Within Corporate Settings

Leadership development in corporate settings allows employees to grow in their skills and prepare to advance within the organization (Amagoh, 2009; Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Stock et al., 2017). A key to a successful leadership development strategy within an organizational setting is aligning the development goals with the organization's mission and purpose (Stander & Van Zyl, 2019). It allows the organization to determine the types of growth and development they would like to offer, provides an opportunity for a structure to be created that blends well with the organization's goals, and includes input from senior-level management (Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018). Through the exploration of leadership development that aligns with the values of an organization, an opportunity is forged for the organization to create systematic changes, evolve leadership standards, and be more responsive to change (Amagoh, 2009; Reimer et al., 2019). These development opportunities can help organizations learn how to utilize individuals to grow leaders by seeking out those open to learning opportunities and growth (Reimer et al., 2019).

For organizations to thrive, there is a need for effective collective leadership, allowing for changes to take place within the rapid growth and dynamic environments that leaders face (Douglas et al., 2021). These changes and growth are seen in specific areas, like banking and healthcare. Healthcare thrives on strong leadership to be successful, yet leadership development is seen as time-consuming and costly (Flaig et al., 2020). However, organizations must develop or provide leadership opportunities to contribute to greater involvement, higher job satisfaction, and a commitment to the organization (Sharma et al., 2019). Organizations that create

opportunities for leadership development through courses, development centers, or other options allow for leader readiness and talent development from within the organization (Stander & Van Zyl, 2019).

Online Leadership Development Programs

Through online leadership development programs, individuals from many organizations worldwide can come together to learn in a collaborative environment (Bassett & Robson, 2017). Online learning allows individuals to proceed at their own pace and at a time that works for their schedule while also eliminating travel costs for traditional professional development, like conferences (Bassett & Robson, 2017; Sowcik et al., 2018). By creating leadership development online, there is an opportunity to target mid-level leaders and allow an opportunity for growth and professional development (Bassett & Robson, 2017). There is also an opportunity to use online leadership development within institution settings and gain a deeper understanding of how these settings create a foundation of leadership understanding for students (Bleich, 2020; Jenkins, 2016; Oyenuga et al., 2020).

Online leadership development within a university setting allows institutions to use various online learning activities to create a healthy classroom environment (Bleich, 2020; Jenkins, 2016). One of the best tools to use within online leadership development is discussion boards, allowing students and participants an opportunity to lead the weekly discussion. This engagement encourages all online community members to engage in meaningful dialog and contribute more detail to discussing topics (Bleich, 2020). Specific disciplines use online leadership development opportunities to allow for greater connection and depth, specifically in pharmacy studies, where students can engage in a regular Zoom meeting with a designated leader to guide discussion and topics around leadership (Oyenuga et al., 2020). In addition to the

opportunities that are taking place within educational institutions, there are startup organizations that are offering professional development opportunities, allowing job seekers to share with potential employers the skills they have learned (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). Most online leadership development opportunities target those who are established within their career or in career-specific education.

Leadership Development Within Education

Leadership development within an educational setting differs from corporate or online environments. Within many educational settings, leadership training or succession planning hierarchy is missing (Daniëls et al., 2019; Fusarelli et al., 2018). This impact can be felt in seeking qualified candidates for principal positions in primary and secondary education (Fusarelli et al., 2018). Most primary and secondary education system individuals seeking leadership positions must obtain additional training through a university rather than within their district (Daniëls et al., 2019; Fusarelli et al., 2018). Yet, there is still a desire to have effective strategies to meet the evolving needs of leadership within schools (Reimer et al., 2019).

What leads to meaningful leadership development within an educational setting is similar to the corporate environment, where administrators seek out individuals who show an interest in additional development courses and will benefit from the experience (Daniëls et al., 2019; Fusarelli et al., 2018; Reimer et al., 2019). Including a practicum within the development courses allow participants to have a tangible leadership role experience (Reimer et al., 2019). Within the practicum experience, allowing participants to reflect on what they are learning with peers allows for a greater understanding of the development taking place (Bush, 2009; Fusarelli et al., 2018; Reimer et al., 2019). These types of practicum experiences and reflection exercises are also seen in higher education.

While leadership development strategies have been explored for individual or corporate development, the proposed study will explore how leadership development strategies prepare students to participate in service-learning opportunities. Organizations that have trained their leaders to lead students in a service-learning project are preparing for the best way to serve the population (Amagoh, 2009). Having adequate leadership development strategies can promote an environment of reflective practices, allowing students to explore how their service relates to their personal development (Bush, 2009; Fusarelli et al., 2018; Reimer et al., 2019).

Leadership Development in Higher Education

Students need to develop specific leadership qualities as they progress through their academic careers. Some of the top qualities in leadership development are problem-solving, responsibility, honesty, and goal setting (Parlar et al., 2017). Various aspects of these skills can continually be developed and cultivated in students, which is a skills approach (Northouse, 2013). Using service-learning pedagogy and the skills approach, students learn how to refine their communication skills, and problem solve with unfamiliar people (Cress et al., 2013; Strawn et al., 2017). It is also noted that students who engage with a faculty mentor have a more robust understanding of leadership and the ability to develop a relationship with their faculty members (Shalka et al., 2019).

Another aspect of leadership in higher education is the development of servant leadership in students. Servant leadership is a common theme in the research on service-learning (Cress et al., 2013; Fink, 2013). Servant leadership traits help students become more authentic leaders and allow students to see an opportunity to work toward the common good (Cress et al., 2013; Fink, 2013; Kiersch & Peters, 2017). By exploring the various levels of servant leadership, students can explore the levels and see how each level best fits within their own experiences (Kiersch &

Peters, 2017; Snell et al., 2015b). There are many ways to engage students in leadership development during their time in higher education through service-learning and leadership-specific exploration (Cress et al., 2013).

Leadership Development Within Specific Disciplines

Research and implementation of leadership development within service-learning are currently taking place in select disciplines. Some areas of interest that include leadership development utilizing service-learning include education, nursing, and business. Though each field approaches leadership development differently, the foundation of using service learning to develop leadership skills shines bright (Cress et al., 2013; Fink, 2013; Kiersch & Peters, 2017). In education, specifically early childhood education, student teachers discover their leadership skills and qualities in practicum classroom settings, allowing for a greater understanding of their career readiness as they graduate college (Diamond, 2014). In law school, leadership practicums have been developed to enable students to learn about various aspects of leadership and implement them within service-learning projects (Morgan, 2016).

In business schools, exploration of leadership development has taken place at international intuitions. Students in Hong Kong received exposure to service-learning by participating in a service-learning project, finding that civic engagement had a direct impact on the development of leadership skills of the students (Chen et al., 2018; Snell et al., 2015a, 2015b). Research conducted with business students in China found that a value-based system allows students to have support in participation in practice and exploration of reflection during the service-learning process (Weng & Yan, 2019).

The continued exploration of discipline-specific leadership development using service-learning explores the impact on first-year honor students (Lyons et al., 2018). The research

findings share the evidence for supporting service-learning in providing leadership development skills to first-year students (Lyons et al., 2018). This follows the exact specifics of either international exploration of leadership development using service-learning or discipline-specific through capstone style courses (Chen et al., 2018; Diamond, 2016; Lyons et al., 2018; Weng & Yan, 2019). These studies continue to provide evidence of the need for research among first-year students in general study courses.

Development of Student Leaders Through Service-Learning

When looking at the significance of leadership development in service-learning, it is essential to note the current work regarding the leadership development of student leaders in higher education. Frameworks are being developed that bring together practitioners and students, allowing students to build and grow their leadership skills in a controlled environment (Hempsall, 2014; Skalicky et al., 2020). Students can also ask questions and lean into their leadership abilities instead of having a universal leadership model to fit into (Fox, 2018; Hempsall, 2014; Skalicky et al., 2020). Using a leadership framework demonstrates that students who understand various aspects of leadership during their undergraduate career are better prepared to share their experiences with future employers and provide clarity on their career preparedness (Fox, 2018).

A strong example of student employees cultivating a deeper understanding of leadership development is explored through relationship development, specifically among students (Hempsall, 2014). When considering mentorship, students with a faculty or staff mentor demonstrate growth in their leadership skills and continued development (Shalka et al., 2019). Students who participate in campus organizations and student employment opportunities also see growth in their leadership skills, allowing for engagement in various leadership opportunities and

skill advancement (Peck & Callahan, 2019; Rosch & Collins, 2017). Though these aspects show leadership development opportunities through multiple activities and on-campus employment, it leaves out the foundational development of leadership skills for first-year students.

Leadership Development Using Service-Learning

Leadership development through service-learning engagement is increasing as researchers realize the growth taking place (Cress et al., 2013; Lester, 2015; Seemiller, 2016). There are increased benefits from implementing service-learning that brings about leadership development for students (Cress et al., 2013; Seemiller, 2016). The general understanding that service-learning benefits students are clear, but how to incorporate leadership development into the service activities are left up to interpretation (Seemiller, 2016). One of the ways that service-learning can be used for leadership development is through reflection, which allows students to reflect on their leadership abilities alongside that of the community partners they are working with (Cress et al., 2013; Guthrie & Jones, 2012). Not only is the use of reflection significant in service-learning experiences, but it also plays a significant role for student leaders, allowing them to explore and evaluate the roles they lead on campus (Huda et al., 2018; Guthrie & Jones, 2012).

Other aspects of leadership development for students engaging in service-learning include encouraging students to use the skills and knowledge they have to inform their work and abilities within the service-learning project (Cress et al., 2013; Lester, 2015). Within this method, there is an element of coordination needed to work with the community partners and establish a relationship that allows all parties to work together toward a shared goal, meeting both the needs of the organization and the learning outcomes of the course (Cress et al., 2013; Lester, 2015; Nagda & Roper, 2019). The willingness to engage in this type of critical dialog allows students

to have a deeper understanding of leadership development and provides a safe environment to share personal views of leadership (Cress et al., 2013; Hemsall, 2014; Nagda & Roper, 2019). Sharing with others allows students to verbalize and externally process what they are reflecting on internally. Regarding the leadership development of first-year students, the acts of reflection and community partner engagement will influence the methods used to determine the growth of leadership development that is taking place for students.

Leadership development in higher education has been explored in discipline-specific development, student leader development, and service-learning. The proposed study will utilize aspects of leadership development in higher education as they relate directly to service-learning (Cress et al., 2013). Specifically, it will look at the skills approach and how students develop and strengthen leadership qualities during their first year of studies (Northouse, 2013; Parlar et al., 2017).

Service-Learning

Service-learning engages students in a service project in conjunction with their academic course (Cress et al., 2013; Griffith & Clark, 2016). Doing so allows students to see real-world examples of the content they are learning in the classroom, fostering more robust civic engagement and a deeper understanding of academic application (Griffith & Clark, 2016; Schalge et al., 2018). The relationship between community partners and students participating in service projects should be clearly communicated (Cress et al., 2013). Still, many community partners and students are confused about what service-learning is and how it relates to academic studies (Schalge et al., 2018). Knowing the importance of service-learning and its significance in the classroom and student development is essential to understand, both for the instructor, community partner, and the student (Cress et al., 2013; Griffith & Clark, 2016; Schalge et al.,

2018). Developing expectations with students before their service-learning experience is essential, as well as establishing relationships with the partnering sites to ensure that student participation is significant.

Service-learning allows students to develop a deeper understanding of the materials they are learning in the classroom and establish a reflective practice that pulls it all together (Griffith & Clark, 2016; Schalge et al., 2018). Through service-learning, students can cultivate other skills related to their learning and future career and establish leadership skills. Students can also develop communication skills with various community members as they work with partners and community members (Benenson et al., 2017; Schalge et al., 2018). Examining the value of service learning and the importance of reflection allows us to see how service-learning develops students in their undergraduate careers (Damons & Dunbar-Krige, 2020; Drinkard & Tontodonato, 2019; Felten et al., 2006; Kawai, 2021; Molee et al., 2010).

Value of Service-Learning in the Classroom

Though understanding the significance of service-learning can sometimes be confusing, having educators trained in the best practices increases the understanding of its importance and significance (Cress et al., 2013; Fink, 2013; Griffith & Clark, 2016). By training an instructor on best practices for service-learning, a deeper understanding of incorporating service-learning into the classroom becomes feasible (Cress et al., 2013; Fink, 2013). Service-learning can quickly be seen as an obligation instead of a learning opportunity, specifically, in the ways the lines can be blurred by instructors or community partners (Jacoby, 2015) Service-learning includes reflection and inquiring about best practices, not simply completing a task, and moving on (Cress et al., 2013; Fink, 2013). Reflective practice is a cornerstone of service-learning, as it demonstrates growth and a connection between classroom engagement and practical experience. As service-

learning continues to be developed and explored, a change in approach has emerged known as critical service-learning, which encourages a shift in power and an authentic development of relationships among instructors, students, and community partners (Benenson et al., 2017; Fink, 2013; Mitchell, 2015). Critical service-learning seeks to allow all participating members to have a deeper understanding of what service-learning is and how it helps deepen learning for students.

Seeing the results of students gaining valuable information, skills, and traits from service-learning participation clarifies the work of service-learning (Drinkard & Tontodonato, 2019; Salam et al., 2019). The value of service-learning provides an increased development outcome for students who participate in civic engagement compared to those who do not engage in service-learning opportunities. Though service-learning may present students with the reality that they cannot change the world immediately, it demonstrates to them how they can make an impact in their community and provides a place for further learning and growth to take place. This supports the development of leadership within service-learning, helping students to realize that they play a role in enhancing their community.

Other aspects of the literature around leadership in service-learning point to the direction of how leadership qualities are derived from the practice of service-learning (Huda et al., 2018; Jacques et al., 2016). Examining the leadership qualities of instructors and site supervisors indicates the importance of strong leadership being demonstrated to students. The outcome of this method is students physically seeing leadership qualities being played out in real-time, allowing students to draw leadership qualities from these individuals (Cress et al., 2013; Fink, 2013; Huda et al., 2018; Jacques et al., 2016). When students see instructors and site leadership supportive of efforts and enthusiastic about the project, students can see positive leadership

qualities that influence their view of leadership. Looking into how leadership can affect one's view gives a more robust understanding of the growth and development of leadership in students.

Reflective Practices in Service-Learning

The reflective activities are the determining factor separating service-learning from community service (Cress et al., 2013). Reflective activities allow students to explore their experience at the service site and the impact taking place on their life, both inside the classroom and outside (Kawai, 2021; Mabry, 1998). However, the reflection process cannot happen randomly and requires careful planning and strategy to provide students with clear direction (Cress et al., 2013; Felten et al., 2006). The process of reflecting on the actions that are taking place allows students an opportunity to express the emotions of what they are experiencing, as well as to see how the service opportunities connect with the learning they are engaging in (Celio et al., 2011; Kawai, 2021). Reflection provides a connecting link between the act of service and the idea of learning.

Reflection practices are the most used method of evaluation within service learning (Celio et al., 2011; Damons & Dunbar-Krige, 2020; Felten et al., 2006; Kawai, 2021; Molee et al., 2010). The DEAL model is the most used evaluation process for reflective practices (Bettencourt, 2015; Molee et al., 2011). The DEAL model provides students with specific prompts that first ask for details on the service project, allowing students an opportunity to examine their personal, academic, and civic engagement perspectives, concluding with articulating what was learned during the process (Bettencourt, 2015; Damons & Dunbar-Krige, 2020; Felten et al., 2006; Kawai, 2021; Molee et al., 2010). Providing opportunities for debriefing with peers, community leaders, and instructors brings another form of reflection, allowing for informal conversations and exploration of what is happening in the moment (Celio

et al., 2011; Damons & Dunbar-Krige, 2020; Sanders et al., 2016). Small group discussion allows students to engage with feelings and emotions tied to the experience, while written reflections allow students to explain the experience and how it relates to classroom learning (Damons & Dunbar-Krige, 2020; Felten et al., 2006; Kawai, 2021). Regardless of the type of reflection, it provides an opportunity for greater depth of learning and development in the students, both personally and academically.

Best Practices in Service-Learning

Reflection is the cornerstone of service-learning pedagogy, yet additional best practices are needed to make the most of the experience for the instructor, community partner, and student. Instructors determining if service-learning best fits their classroom should decide what activities will best fit within their curriculum (Pawlowski, 2018; Preradovic & Stark, 2019). To make the experience significant, it must relate to what is taught within the classroom. Another aspect is ensuring that the experience meets a real-world need within the community. Establishing a community need can be done by connecting with community partners before the start of the course and sharing the hopes of the experience and how it will relate to classroom learning. By establishing collaboration with a community partner, clear goals are defined that can determine the success of the experience, as well as a designated timeframe. Continued communication with the community partner ensures that both the instructor and partner are in alignment when it comes to the students learning and experience, as well as allowing for adjustments to take place throughout the experience (Cress et al., 2013; Pawlowski, 2018; Preradovic & Stark, 2019). Following best practices for service learning creates a strong foundation for student learning and development during the experience.

Student Development Through Service-Learning

Participating in service-learning helps students advance many areas of their life, not just a specific class (Bettencourt, 2015; Toews & Cerny, 2005; Wheat et al., 2019). Service-learning activities also help students transition in their cogitative understanding and to more self-directed learning over time (Harkins et al., 2018; Howe et al., 2014). The primary skills and development students learn are collaborating with community members and various service sites (Cress et al., 2010; Cress et al., 2013). The additional aspects students gain from this experience are communication, connecting learning materials to real-world experiences, personal growth, and professional development (Toews & Cerny, 2006; Wheat et al., 2019). These developmental changes are fostered through the act of reflection, allowing students an opportunity to share their experiences and the ways it is impacting their lives, both academically and personally (Bettencourt, 2015; Wheat et al., 2019).

Classroom experiences involving service learning allow students to connect to the materials being taught and allow students an opportunity to grow their knowledge (Bettencourt, 2015; Harkins et al., 2018; Wheat et al., 2019). Through participating in service learning, students learn about social responsibility and how to connect with their community (Cress et al., 2013; Toews & Cerny, 2005; Wheat et al., 2019). Service-learning also allows students to develop personally and professionally, learning how to empower others and themselves, among other skill development (Harkins et al., 2018; Wheat et al., 2019). Regarding professional development, students learn how to communicate with peers and site supervisors, work alongside community members, and be a leader (Wheat et al., 2019; Howe et al., 2014). Service-learning's personal, professional, and academic development outcomes align with Kolb's experiential learning theory (Howe et al., 2014). By developing student learning outcomes around a specific

student development theory, such as Kolb's experiential learning theory, service learning can create level-specific outcomes based on where students are within their undergraduate careers. Exploring the significance of the first-year experience helps clarify the types of student development that take place.

While service learning has been explored to meet community needs with classroom learning, the proposed study will examine how service-learning impacts first-year students. Service learning allows students to see real-world examples of classroom content by fostering strong civic engagement and a deeper understanding of academic application (Cress et al., 2013; Schalge et al., 2018). Utilizing the aspects of reflective activities and best practices, as well as meeting a community need, the study seeks to discover how service-learning impacts first-year students (Cress et al., 2013).

First-Year Experience

First-year experience programs offer incoming students an opportunity to learn and grow in their first year of college. Within this experience, students form relationships with their peers, become familiar with the institution, connect with a peer mentor, and learn valuable skills (Ahadi et al., 2019; Hickinbottom-Brawn & Burns, 2015; McClushkey et al., 2019). Many first-year experience programs hold a shared belief that incoming students are underprepared for college and benefit from a program targeted at bridging the gap between high school and college and building a sense of belonging. Through this shared belief, institutions have taken to reworking the requirements of first-year courses, providing a shared seminar, required set of courses in the first semester, or living communities for students. Some institutions have worked service-learning into the first-year seminar program's requirements, allowing students to push the university bubble's boundaries and be involved in their new community. Regardless of the types

of options available to students for the first-year experience program, the goal is to increase retention and engagement within the institution (Hickinbottom-Brawn & Burns, 2015; García-Ros et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2019).

First-year experience programs allow students to connect with the institution and community in many ways, including peer connection and community involvement (Ahadi et al., 2019; McCluskey et al., 2019; Sharp, 2021). Allowing students to connect with classmates from the start of their college experience and continue through courses in a cohort model will enable students to build relationships and foundations to join them and the institution (García-Ros et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2019; Sharp, 2021). First-year students learn about essential departments on campus that help them succeed and where to go when they need personal and academic help (Kearney, 2019; Sharp, 2021). The incorporation of peer learning coaches or mentors from upper-classman provides first-year students an opportunity to have someone to connect with about questions in a non-threatening way and is found to help improve success (Bowman & Holmes, 2018; Garcia-Ros et al., 2018; Jamelske, 2008; Sharp, 2021).

Purpose of First-Year Experiences

The purpose of first-year experience programs is to promote retention and involvement in the first year of college for incoming students, as well as bridge the gap between high school and college (Hickinbottom-Brawn & Burns, 2015; García-Ros et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2019). In the early process of first-year experience programs, the targeted students were those classified as at-risk, below grade level, or first-generation (Bowman & Holmes, 2018; Nelson et al., 2012). As the first-year experience has evolved, institutions have used it to promote student engagement and connection to the institution, finding ways to strengthen students in their studies and build community among their peers (Ahadi et al., 2019; García-Ros et al., 2018). First-year

experience programs involve faculty members who work to engage students in learning and bring students up to the academic rigor of the institution (Hickinbottom-Brawn & Burns, 2015; Stewart, 2011). Whether a course or a year-long program, first-year experience programs share with students how to navigate campus and find offices that can meet a student need, like study skills from the writing center or addressing personal needs at the student health center. First-year experience programs bring students together to let them see that they are not alone in their struggles with the transition to college.

Types of First-Year Experiences

First-year experience programs have a wide range of programming options, including but not limited to: peer mentoring, academic preparedness, living-learning communities, and research or community engagement opportunities. Peer mentoring offers an opportunity for first-year students to gain information from upper-classmen in peer communication and promotes social success (Bowman & Holmes, 2017; García-Ros et al., 2018; Jamelske, 2009; Morsi et al., 2007; Sharp, 2021). This type of first-year experience program allows students to feel connected and build a sense of belonging, engage with peers, and learn about the institution in a safe environment. Peer mentors also offer an opportunity for upper-level students to work with faculty members who teach first-year experience courses and build a bridge between classroom success and student preparedness (Jamelske, 2009; Sharp, 2021). Peer mentors direct first-year students to various offices on campus, helping with the adjustment period, leading first-year students in service-learning activities, and helping create social opportunities (Kearney, 2019; Sharp, 2021).

Another example of a first-year experience program is a living-learning community, allowing students an opportunity to live with others who are interested in a similar topic or

enrolled in the same academic program (Sharp, 2021). In addition to living-learning communities, programs can offer a first-year experience course or specific curriculum, allowing students to learn impactful study habits and improve their writing, among other valuable skills (Samson & Granath, 2004; Sharp, 2021). Through the ability to learn skills to advance academically and exposure to departments to work with for improvement, students are more successful and, in return, have greater retention at their institution (García-Ros et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2019).

Another aspect of first-year experience programs is allowing incoming first-year students to participate in research opportunities, community engagement, or living-learning communities. Living-learning communities allow students to engage with classmates and peer mentors in their residence halls, allowing for a stronger community and enhanced learning (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013; Jamelske, 2009). Students participating in research programs during their first year can have valuable hands-on experiences, learn more about the research process, and connect with faculty members (Bowman & Holmes, 201). Students who participate in community engagement in their first-year experience programs can build relationships with their peers around a shared meaning and break outside the campus bubble, engaging in a new way with their community. These aspects of first-year experience programs allow for more significant personal and academic impacts on the student's life.

Impact of the First-Year Experience

Whether first-year experience programs are optional or required, there is a significant impact on students academically and personally, as well as on institutional retention (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016). First-year experience programs allow students to learn how to be better academically and transition into college (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016). Students gain a sense

of connection to their institution and build a community that provides them the needed support to succeed (Ahadi et al., 2019; García-Ros et al., 2018). Among students who are the first in their families to attend college, first-year experience programs make an impact in aiding these students through the transition and supporting them in multiple aspects, from academic expectations to navigating campus (Allaire, 2022; Bowman & Holmes, 2018). Institutions with first-year experience programs that include service learning see a higher percentage of students become involved within the community and have deeper connections with peers (Saltmarch & Zlotkowski, 2011; Stavrianouloulos, 2008). By incorporating service-learning in first-year experience programs, students learn about civic responsibility and seek involvement throughout their academic careers (Stewart, 2012). The impact of first-year experience programs continues to bring engagement in many forms, securing students' connection to the institution and desire to continue in academic studies, among other involvement. While first-year experience programs have been explored for ways to meet the needs of incoming university students and their connection to the institution, the study explores how first-year students are provided service-learning opportunities during this time.

Summary

Within the literature, leadership development of college students is known to be significant, but it is fostered mainly in students who are in their later years of college or those who are involved in a student leadership role. The research gap incorporates leadership development principles using service-learning principles for first-year students in higher education, specifically within a first-year experience program. This study explores how service-learning implementation within a student's first-year experience courses allows for introductory understanding and foundational development of leadership skills. Incorporating the

understanding of service-learning in a student's first-year experience program, as well as a broad knowledge of selected leadership styles and principles and allowing students an opportunity to explore their leadership style through past reflection and future projection is significant. It is a much-needed addition to empirical research, filling the current literature gap. Using the theoretical framework, this study will build upon the principles that Kolb (1984) explored, that the continuous cycle of reflection will create a deeper understanding of the studied area. In this regard, understanding selected leadership principles and their relation to a student's growth will take place through reflective practices that allow them to see change over time. The study adds relevance to the current research by exploring the significance of introductory leadership development of first-year students, more specifically through using service-learning principles within general study courses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the leadership experiences of alumni who completed an undergraduate program with a first-year service-learning component. Chapter three details the method in which this research takes place and the approach used. Details of the study include information on the participants, setting, design, research questions, and procedures. The research procedures include the data collection and analysis methods and the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design

The qualitative research method is used for this study. Qualitative research is appropriate for studies that examine lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and participants' meanings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since the purpose of this study is to examine the leadership experiences of alumni who participated in first-year service-learning courses, a qualitative approach gives an opportunity for a holistic account of the phenomenon. It also permits an emergent design that takes shape throughout the data collection and analysis process for an in-depth and beneath-the-surface understanding of the phenomenon and participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

While there are a variety of qualitative designs, the phenomenological design is best suited for this study. Specifically, a phenomenological design allows participants to share their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) of participating in service-learning activities during their first year of college. Within the phenomenological approach, the research takes the individual lived experiences of the participants and describes the common meaning of the concept (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This means the use of

phenomenological design allowed for the exploration of what the participants experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Two basic forms of phenomenology are hermeneutic and transcendental (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Hermeneutic phenomenology looks at lived experiences and an interpretation of the *texts* of life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Collected data is analyzed by its relation to the topic of interest, balancing out lived experiences to the texts of life. Transcendental phenomenology identifies a phenomenon to study and collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. The data is analyzed by finding significant statements or experiences and grouping them into themes. Rather than the interpretation of participant experience that results from hermeneutic phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology results in a description of the essence of the phenomenon studied.

The specific approach for the study was transcendental phenomenology. The transcendental phenomenological approach rose from Husserl's ideologies that regarded experience as a "starting point for knowledge" (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017, p. 168). The transcendental phenomenological method is the best approach for this study as it permits the understanding of the phenomenon to be revealed through the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994) rather than through the researcher's interpretation. In transcendental phenomenology, individuals sharing their stories provide a reconstructed view of a lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This approach allowed an understanding of the individuals' lived experiences and future recommendations for the leadership development of first-year students through service learning.

Research Questions

Research questions for this study include the following:

Central Research Question

What are the shared leadership experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning activities during their first-year courses?

Sub Question One

What are the active experimentation experiences of alumni who participated in first-year service-learning activities?

Sub Question Two

What are the reflection experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning activities in their first-year courses?

Setting and Participants

This section presents the setting for the research and the participants that were sought out for the study. Setting details are given in general terms to allow the study to be replicated in the future. Proposed participant demographics are provided to show the desired population for the research and their fit for the study's topic.

Setting

The setting for this study included a large pool of individuals from throughout the United States. They have graduated with their bachelor's degree within the last five years and participated in service-learning activities during their first year of studies. Participants come from Bird University, a large public research institution in the Midwest. The institution holds its accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission. Bird University uses a chancellor leadership model, including a board of regents for leadership guidance. The institution has a required first-year experience program that incorporates service-learning activities throughout the year. This is done through a two and three-credit seminar course available only in the fall

specifically for first-year students. The course is offered in a variety of topics and taught by faculty members from across the institution. Students are invited to select a course that interests them, recognizing that students from various departments and programs will be together. These courses are overseen by the Office of Academic Programs and Experiential Learning.

Participants

To protect the credibility of the study, the range of the participants will be delimited to those who have graduated from Bird University in the last five years. Alumni for this study are classified as individuals who graduated from the institution with a four-year bachelor's degree. All alumni who graduated from Bird University will have participated in the first-year seminar course and service-learning experiences, as it is a required part of Bird University's curriculum. Due to this requirement, participants come from any area of study. Currently, Bird University's student body is made up of just under 20,000 students. Seventy percent of Bird University's students identify as White, 8% identify as Hispanic or Latino, 5% identify as Asian, 4% of students identify as two or more races, 0.5% identify as black or African American, and 0.1% of students identify as native or Pacific Islander. Currently, the three most common bachelor's degrees are general psychology, journalism, and general finance. With this current demographic makeup, it is expected that participants will reflect a similar breakdown.

Researcher Positionality

As the researcher for this qualitative study, I served as the human instrument. When examining the research to my views and reflection, I realized the need for further research and developing leadership opportunities for first-year students. Experiencing the desire for further information and development of my leadership skills as an undergraduate and graduate student, I knew that there was limited opportunity for students to develop their sense of leadership

understanding or ways to cultivate leadership skills. A greater understanding of the situation to self is revealed through the reflection of the interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions, and my role as the researcher.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework that was used in this study is that of social constructivism. Social constructivism allows individuals to find understanding within the world that they live in and develop meaning in their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Allowing space for each participant to share their lived experience will create a construct of meaning around an individual's point of view. The process of determining if an individual experienced leadership development through service-learning activities is determined by one's experiences and personal opinions. As a researcher, I cannot tell someone how their experience resulted in leadership development; individuals must determine this for themselves. As a social constructivist, I used the participants' experiences to construct the shared essence of the phenomenon.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions allow a deeper understanding of where I stand as the researcher. Through my personal views, beliefs, and background, I have a foundation upon which I stand that leadership development is significant during a student's undergraduate career. Further exploration of these areas of views, beliefs, and background will lead to where the research could land. The ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions will show the specific areas for my philosophical assumptions.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions are the nature of multiple realities and their characteristics, addressing when something is real (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ontological assumption I hold

as a social constructivist is that many aspects of reality are being constructed. Individuals are faced with many choices daily, which help shape their reality. Each choice comes with a consequence, which can be good or bad, and allows individuals to go down their life's path and the direction they wish to go. For those who want to have a deeper understanding of their leadership skills, their choices result in learning more about themselves and the type of leader they strive to emulate. Each participant's reality was explored through interviews, timeline and digital data collection, and focus groups.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions are the relationship between the researcher's knowledge of what is being studied and the individuals who are being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I hold the epistemological assumption that reality is constructed and shaped by individual experiences. Through my development as a leader, I have found the type of leader I am and the types of leadership that I do not want to align with. These types of understanding and growth have led me to a desire to research how service-learning can impact the leadership development of college students. Through the literature review, I determined that the gap resulted in a deeper understanding of leadership development among first-year students, creating an opportunity for deeper study. By examining the lived experiences of individuals who participated in this study, I was able to understand the significance of leadership development through service-learning opportunities for first-year students.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions assume that all research has value within it and includes the values system of the inquirer (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within my axiological assumption as a social constructivist, I believe that each participant's lived experience holds meaning and value.

If a participant feels that they have or have not gained leadership development skills through their lived experience, I, as the researcher, am to honor and value this experience. In the focus group, participants discussed how their lived experiences allowed for leadership development skills and determined if one method held more significance than another. My role as the researcher was to ensure that each participant felt valued and that their lived experience accurately portrayed how they perceived the world.

Researcher's Role

My role as the researcher was to be the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), collecting and analyzing the data used in the study. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, I used the epoché process (Moustakas, 1994), making sure to set aside any prejudgments I had regarding the study's topic. To do this, I began with a bracketing essay laying out my own experiences with service learning and leadership development during my undergraduate degree. Epoché will also be exercised throughout the study using a reflective journal and memos as I collect and analyze my data. My goal as the researcher is to allow the participants to share their stories within their own lived construct without incorporating my biases. I will value any information gained about the lived experiences of the individuals who choose to share their experience with service-learning opportunities and leadership development during their undergraduate careers. Any previous relationship I have with participants will be made known once the interviews have been conducted, keeping in mind that the selection of interview candidates will be at random and based on those who wish to share their stories with me. The bias I brought into the interviews with participants was that those who gained leadership development through service-learning opportunities are better set up for success than those who did not receive these opportunities.

Procedures

The procedures for this study are outlined below. They began first with the needed permissions and the recruitment plan. Then the data collection and analysis procedures follow.

Permissions

The research did not begin until the appropriate permissions were obtained. The first permission needed was IRB approval (See Appendix A). Next, site approval was pursued (See Appendix B). Site approval includes permission to post on the alumni group page on Facebook and the LinkedIn page for the institution, as both are overseen by the institution.

Recruitment Plan

After IRB and site approval were obtained, the first round of recruitment took place through the site posting the invitation to participate (See Appendix C) on their Facebook and LinkedIn alum groups. Recruitment also took place using social media posts in an institution-specific alum group posted by the administrators. I was not a member of the Facebook groups or interested in the LinkedIn profiles to protect the participants and their interactions with the post. Additional recruitment took place through targeted messages via LinkedIn to individuals who self-identified as graduates from the site. Those who expressed interest in participating in the study were asked to share the invite to participate with others they knew who graduated from the site. Demographic and interest surveys were open to all members of the Facebook and LinkedIn communities, participating by selecting the link and completing the Google form (See Appendix D). Once participants communicated their interest in the study, I contacted the chosen participants, determining the best fit for study participants with a maximum variation sample in mind. Participants were contacted with a follow-up email (See Appendix E) thanking them for their interest and the study's timeline and digital data collection instructions, as well as receiving

the consent form (See Appendix F). Once a participant's timeline and digital data collection were received, an individual interview was scheduled via Zoom (See Appendix G). The minimum participant threshold for the research design was ten participants, as this minimum provides enough varied voices for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After ten, additional participants were considered until saturation was achieved or no new information was emerging. This number of interviews allowed for a broad range of co-constructed realities. After the interviews, all participants were invited to participate in a focus group. Ideally, focus groups should be made up of four to six individuals. If all participants would like to participate in the focus group, two focus groups will be held with four to six individuals per group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed participants to share similar experiences and ways their programs differed. After the focus groups, a review of the data, including interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and timeline and digital data collected, took place to determine the themes and shared experiences. The three different sources of data helped achieve triangulation.

Data Collection Plan

After participants were identified, they received instructions to create a timeline about their experience with service learning and providing photographs. The timeline should take no more than 60 minutes to complete and is an appropriate strategy for qualitative studies because they allow for additional themes to come up that may not be presented in interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This helped participants work through memories of past experiences and reflect on their impact, both during their time in undergrad and in their careers now. After timelines were received, interviews with participants were scheduled on an agreed-upon date and time and conducted via Zoom. Interviews were 45–60 minutes and were an appropriate strategy for qualitative studies because they allowed for knowledge to be constructed between the

interviewee and the interviewer. Interviews enable participants to share their stories of leadership development through service-learning activities during their first-year courses. Conducting interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of what the individuals had experienced and the impact of leadership development from service-learning activities. The last data collection method was two focus groups with 4–6 individuals who expressed interest in participating after individual interviews and timeline collection. The focus group was an appropriate strategy for qualitative studies because it enabled interviewees to share more information about their experiences when they may have been hesitant in one-on-one interviews.

Timeline and Digital Data Collection

Participants were asked to establish a timeline of their service learning and leadership experiences from their first year of college to present day (see Appendix F). Participants were provided a two-week time frame, which allowed enough time to complete the directive while keeping the request relevant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collected through the timeline and digital data collection provided an understanding of the experiences of service-learning within the participant's first-year experience, as well as leadership opportunities since their first-year seminar. The timeline also allowed participants to recall their time in their undergraduate program and the beginning of their careers to fully reflect on their activities and how those things have impacted their lives. Participants were invited to provide photos where possible, allowing for personal reflection. Photos offer an opportunity for crosschecking and clarification as the researcher notes significant events that helped shape the participant's leadership development and volunteerism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Timeline and digital data collection fits within the phenomenological study as it allowed participants to provide information about their experience and create an understanding of meaning within the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Timeline and Digital Data Questions

1. Please create a timeline that begins with your first-year seminar course and ends with your current volunteer activities and leadership opportunities today. Please include what course you participated in during your first-year seminar and the service-learning activity done within this course. Please include any leadership roles you have held throughout this time. Include service-learning activities you participated in during your undergraduate coursework, as well as volunteer opportunities. (CRQ; SQ1; SQ2)
2. Please provide any photos you have of your leadership opportunities, volunteerism, and service-learning participation. (CRQ)

Timeline and Digital Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for the timeline and digital photos began with reviewing each written timeline and photographs provided. After the first review, a second review took place to start the bracketing process. Within this process, the epoché approach was utilized, seeking to see the untainted experiences of the participant, and keeping my own bias out of the constructed meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The process of horizontalization ensured that each event shared had equal value (Moustakas, 1994). After bracketing and horizontalization, reduction and elimination occurred, seeking to find the invariant constituents.

Individual Interviews

Interviews of the individuals allowed for sharing more information on lived experiences of service-learning within general study courses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This method relates to phenomenological studies in the ways it allows for descriptions of the experience and provides a singular narrative (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews took place with individuals about the service-learning components they experienced during their undergraduate

careers. The interviews happened through video conferencing, arranging a time that best suited the participant and the researcher, lasting between 45–60 minutes. The questions below helped to guide the interviews and provide an opportunity to have flexibility as needed in conversations with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, including your name and any background information you wish to provide.
2. Please share with me about your time in undergrad, including the classes you participated in, your major, and extracurricular activities you participated in.
3. From the service-learning experience during your first-year seminar that you have shared in your timeline, please elaborate on what you did, specifically... (pull a certain event or experience from the timeline for further inquiry). (CRQ)
4. Based on this experience during your first year of college, please elaborate on the other service-learning opportunities you participated in during your undergraduate experience. (CRQ)
5. In what ways did these opportunities impact you? (SQ1)
6. How did these activities within your first-year impact or shape the major you selected or your career path? (SQ1)
7. Please share what you feel is the significance of service-learning within the first year of undergraduate. (SQ1)
8. In what ways, if any, were you provided the opportunity to process what you were experiencing and what you learned from it? (SQ2)

9. In what ways has participating in service-learning helped you learn about being a leader?
(SQ1)
10. Within your reflective practices, in what ways do you think you worked through the process of what a leader looks like and your leadership style? (SQ1; SQ2)
11. How do you think service-learning within first-year courses could be made better for incoming students? (CRQ)
12. Do you have any additional information you would like to provide or share on leadership development courses or service-learning for undergraduate students?

Questions 1 and 2 provided an opportunity to gain information about the interviewee while establishing rapport. These questions are intended to be simple. Questions 3–7 begin to dive deeper into any significant moments within their undergraduate career. This allowed the participant to share impactful moments from their time in undergrad and build a connection with the researcher. These questions also ask about their experience with service-learning within their first-year experience, seeking to understand the courses they have taken and how they have impacted their life. These questions seek to understand the past experiences of the interviewee (Polkinghorne, 2005). Questions 8–10 explored the reflection activities the participant engaged in during their first-year experience. Service-learning opportunities allow students to gain a deeper understanding of what they are learning in the classroom (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Questions 11–13 allowed the interviewee to share the significance of their service-learning activities within their first-year experience, share why they think others should participate in similar courses, and provide any information they feel is relevant that they did not share. Using an interview guide, the opportunity for additional questions was incorporated as I saw fit within the conversation.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for the individual interviews began with transcribing each interview. After the interviews were transcribed, the bracketing process took place, seeking to see the untainted experiences of the participant bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This is accomplished through epoché, seeking to see what is stated and keeping my bias out of the constructed meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The process of horizontalization ensured that each statement had equal value and listed every statement relevant to the experience. After bracketing and horizontalization, reduction and elimination occurred, seeking to find the invariant constituents.

Focus Groups

Focus groups allowed individual interview participants to collaborate with other individuals with similar shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus group questions helped explore the themes presented in individual interviews and see the similarities and differences of participants. Focus groups were conducted online via Zoom at a determined time that worked best for participants and the researcher and lasted approximately 60 minutes in length.

Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me about some of your favorite moments during your service-learning experiences.
(CRQ; SQ1)
2. How do you think your service-learning experiences prepared you to be a leader? (SQ1)
3. What aspects or components of the service-learning process really helped you reflect on who you were as a leader or the leader that you wanted to be? (SQ1; SQ2)

4. Reflecting on your choice of major and career path, how do you think the service-learning activities you participated in during your first year of undergraduate influenced your choices? (SQ1; SQ2)
5. How would you describe your leadership style now? (CRQ)
6. In what ways, if any, do you think service-learning helped you develop in your leadership style or leadership capability? (CRQ; SQ1; SQ2)

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for the focus group began with transcribing the group session. After the session was transcribed, the bracketing process took place, seeking to see the untainted experiences of the participant bias using the Epoché process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The method of horizontalization ensured that each statement had equal value and listed every statement relevant to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). After bracketing and horizontalization, reduction and elimination occurred, seeking to find the invariant constituents. Following reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents took place, seeking to find the core themes of the experience. The final step was identifying the invariant constituents and themes. This step ensures that the themes and invariant constituents match the completed record of the participants, looking at both the focus group session and the individual interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Synthesis

The process of synthesizing the data occurred by looking at the reoccurring themes that came up throughout the timeline and digital data collection, interviews, and focus groups. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents took place, seeking to find the core themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). I used the individual textural and structural descriptions

that were formed earlier to synthesize and create a composite textual description that explains the experience of the phenomenon. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes ensured that consistent themes appeared in each data collection method and collectively, ensuring triangulation. These synthesis methods follow the modified Van Kaam method. After the data was synthesized, a final reflection of the experience will be shared, presenting the truly shared experiences collected from the participants.

Trustworthiness

This study must provide trustworthiness to those who participate in the research and those who read the study. Completing a trustworthy study includes being transparent with the methods of research and the ways that research is conducted. Trustworthiness can be described through the explanation of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical consideration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

The credibility of this study was ensured by providing accurate information, both in the participants' stories and the knowledge gained. Credibility can be found in how the findings describe reality, specifically with the phenomenon in question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement through timeline and digital data, individual interviews, and focus groups helped build trust with the researcher and allow for a better understanding of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation of the data establishes credibility, allowing the multiple sources of timeline and digital data collection, individual interviews, and focus groups to show the phenomena taking place.

Transferability

Within the study, it should be found that the questions asked and data analyzed can be transitioned into compatible research that seeks to gain similar information at a different university or region. Showing that the findings may be applicable in other contexts allows for transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability will be increased through transparency in the questions asked in surveys and interviews and the various themes and data analysis found throughout the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A detailed description of the study site and individuals participating allows for a decision about the transferability. Maximum variation of the study sample was sought after, which also increases transferability to specific majors, genders, ethnic groups, and career areas.

Dependability

Dependability means showing how the findings are consistent and can be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The dependability of this study included providing detailed information on the study process, gaining participants, and data analysis from multiple aspects, including survey information, interviews, and document analysis. The ability of someone else to follow the data trail of the study provides a level of depth to the confirmability of the study.

Confirmability

The confirmability of this study maintained that neutrality was upheld. Within this, it is essential that, as the researcher, I was not biased and allowed the participants to construct their reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was done by representing the stories and experiences shared through the research, regardless of the personal bias and interest I held in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was confirmed by auditing the research and confirming that the

stories were shared using the epoché method (Moustakas, 1994). From the experiences shared, bracketing was utilized to group similar experiences and determine the phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study included the storage of survey data, interviews, and data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Information was stored on a computer specifically for the study with password protection. The confidentiality of the participants was also important, maintaining that pseudonyms were included for all detailing information about their story, name, or institution attended. All information was stored within a Google account specific to the study, allowing for additional password protection and authenticity codes for access. All participants completed consent forms, allowing their information and data to be shared within the study. IRB approval was also received to confirm the ethical consideration of the.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived leadership development experiences fostered through service-learning activities during one's undergraduate career, specifically in first-year courses. Data collected through timeline and digital data collection, interviews, and focus groups were analyzed to provide a strong understanding of the possibility of leadership development through service-learning for first-year students. Following the research method, synthesizing the data utilized the epoché approach, seeking to use horizontalization, bracketing, textual descriptions, and structural descriptions. The chapter concludes by outlining the ethical considerations for the study and the actions of the researcher to protect the participants and the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the leadership experiences of alumni who completed an undergraduate program with a first-year service-learning component. This chapter shares participants' discussions of their lived experiences around service-learning, career and degree selection, leadership and personal growth, and continued service. The chapter begins with participant descriptions, followed by the results of the data, which have been categorized into three themes with subthemes, a discussion of outlier data and findings, and concluding with research question responses.

Participants

This section provides information about the participants. A total of 10 participants were recruited who had experienced this study's central phenomenon: enrolling in a first-year seminar course with a service-learning component at Bird University. The descriptions of the individuals include the year they graduated, the major they pursued, the highest degree earned, and their current career. Participants were solicited using direct invitation to participate via LinkedIn, asking them to complete an interest survey to ensure they met the research criteria (see Appendix D). Of the individuals who received the invitation to participate, 10 responded and completed the interest survey, meeting the desired criteria for the research. The demographics of participants are presented in Table 1.

Andy

When Andy first started his undergraduate career, he was interested in pursuing a degree in history. He knew he enjoyed history and wanted to learn more. During this first-year service project, he worked with kids at an afterschool program and enjoyed his time. He continued

working with this organization his entire career and determined near his graduation that he wanted to pursue teaching. After he graduated, Andy sought a master's degree in teaching and is currently a literature and history teacher to middle school students.

Anna

Anna went into undergraduate not knowing what she wanted to do. She first intended to get a degree in communications, but quickly learned it was not a good fit. After a few exploratory courses in other interest areas, she found an affinity for business. After a few internships and volunteer experiences, she discovered that she liked working with people and selected an interest area in human resources.

Collin

Collin entered into undergraduate with a desire to do something in line with video production and communications. He had dabbled in this interest area while in high school and knew it would be of interest. During his first-year seminar course, he found an opportunity to volunteer on the tech and video team at his local church. Throughout his time as an undergrad, he continued volunteering at his church and growing his skills in video production. Eventually, it led to a full-time career. Eventually, Collin decided to pursue a career in a different direction but speaks fondly of his time learning video production and the early days of volunteering at his church.

Jacob

Jacob holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education with a focus on mid-level math and science. He also has a master's degree in curriculum development. He is presently a middle school science teacher. During his time as an undergraduate, he shared of various activities he

was able to do, including working in a fish hatchery and helping teach kids about a fish's life cycle.

John

John is a pastor at a church presently. He always knew he wanted to go into ministry. When he first started his undergraduate, he made an effort to find a church and got involved in the youth ministry, which was his volunteer requirement during his first-year introductory course. He served in youth his entire undergraduate career and found mentors that helped direct him what how to be a pastor and gave him various opportunities to preach to the students. John pursued a master's degree in biblical studies after his undergraduate because he knew being a pastor was his call and he wanted a degree specifically aligned with his career direction.

Kelly

Kelly knew she wanted to work with kids from a young age. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in teaching. She worked in many capacities with kids including Sunday school ministries, volunteering in local classrooms, and working at a preschool. She is grateful for every opportunity she had to learn from other teachers, sharing that they are the reason she is a good teacher.

Larry

Larry always knew he wanted to get a degree in mechanical engineering. He was excited to begin his undergraduate degree and see the ways he would learn and grow in the area he had always dreamed of pursuing. He participated in an introductory course for students interested in mechanical engineering and knew it was exactly what he wanted to do. One of the biggest impacts during his undergraduate career was a service trip to Alaska and seeing how he could practically use his degree.

Mary

Mary pursued a degree in communications while in undergraduate. She enjoyed the various activities she participated in and the service activities she was part of in either classrooms or outside electives. Presently she works in research development fundraising and is thankful for the impact service activities have had on her. Those activities help her to be her best in her job and seek out ways to make an impact on others.

Rita

Rita has a degree in public health and was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. During her undergraduate career, she was able to help with vaccine administration and help those in need. Her real-life experience prompted her to continue in a career in public health and to work on making an impact in the lives of others.

Tracy

When Tracy started her undergraduate career, she wanted to major in business. Though she enjoyed the direction she was going, she was swayed by a personal relationship to change her major. After spending time working towards a different major, she realized what she wanted to study was business, and eventually she earned her bachelor's degree in business management. Presently she holds a career as a corporate analyst and could not be happier with her decision.

Table 1

Participants

Participant	Year Graduated	Major	Highest Degree Earned	Current Career	Ethnicity
Tracy	2019	Business Management	Bachelors	Corporate Analyst	White
John	2018	Religious Studies	Masters	Pastor	White
Anna	2019	Business Administration	Bachelors	HR Director	White

Larry	2018	Mechanical Engineering	Bachelors	Engineer	White
Collin	2018	Communications	Bachelors	Corporate Event Planner	White
Kelly	2019	Elementary Education	Masters	Elementary Teacher	White
Jacob	2018	Elementary Education	Masters	Middle School Teacher	White
Andy	2018	History	Master	Middle School Teacher	White
Mary	2018	Communications	Bachelors	Research Development Fundraising	White
Rita	2021	Public Health	Bachelors	Public Health Professional	Hispanic

Results

The results of the research data analysis are presented in this section. The data's were collected using three collection methods: timeline generation starting with the first-year introduction course that had a service-learning component during their first year of college (see Appendix F), individual interviews via Zoom (see Appendix E), and focus groups via Zoom (see Appendix E). Interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analyzed to identify themes that emerged from the participants. The timelines were reviewed to see the progression of each participant and later reviewed to support the interviews and focus groups. Together, all three data collection points allowed for themes to emerge and the central research question and sub-questions to be answered. The themes and subsequent subthemes are: Shaped by Experience with subthemes Major Direction and Solidification and Post Graduate Education and Career Direction; Growth as a Leader with subthemes Personal Development and Leadership Development; Continued Service. Included within the themes and subthemes are in vivo participant quotes to provide evidence for the emergent theme (see Table 2).

Table 2*Themes and Sub-Themes*

Theme	Sub-Theme
Shaped by Experience	Major Direction and Solidification
	Post Graduation Education and Career Development
Growth as a Leader	Personal Development
	Leadership Development
Continued Service	

Shaped by Experience

After reviewing the data from the timelines, interviews, and focus groups, the first theme to present was how the experiences shaped each participant. Though not each participant enjoyed the service-learning experience that took place during their first-year seminar course, all expressed experiences from some point in their undergraduate career that had a significant impact on their lives. “I think volunteering helps shape a person and if I had done it more in my first few years, maybe I wouldn’t have wasted so much time in school studying something I didn’t love” (Anna, Interview). The impact was felt in ways of perspective and direction. “It gave me a perspective of direction and really pushed me” (Collin, Interview). The experience helped participants feel a connection outside of the classroom or university. “I feel like it gives people a sense of connection to those around them” (Andy, Interview). It also provided participants with tangible experience in their desired careers. “Working what I went into helped me know what I was going to be doing” (Kelly, Interview). From this theme, two subthemes emerged around Major Direction and Solidification and Post Graduate Education and Career Direction.

Major Direction and Solidification

All members of the study shared that the seminar course either reinforced their desire to continue to pursue their intended major or make a directional change based on what they learned in the seminar course. Out of the 10 people who participated in the study, two participants sought a change in major after their seminar course.

My seminar course was in business because I was interested in it. But outside pressure from my boyfriend at the time made me change majors. I changed my mind to major in nursing or nutrition. Only after we broke up did I realize I wanted to pursue business.

(Tracy, Interview)

“I started college thinking I wanted to be a communication major. After the seminar class for communications, I decided to dabble in sociology. But by the end of my second year I was pretty set on business” (Anna, Interview). Though not directly impacted by the service learning these individuals participated in during their first-year seminar course, later experiences helped solidify their change in major. Anna shared, “I worked at a summer camp one summer. It helped me realize I did not want to work a crazy amount of hours for little pay.” Anna also shared about various internships she did later in college, stating “I felt like I was gaining real-world experiences that actually had an impact in real-time.” Tracy talked about the impact her retail career had on her coursework when she switched back to business, sharing “My first few courses in business went well. But my management career is what really kept me going.”

Eight of the 10 participants shared that their seminar course and service-learning helped provide clear directives for the major they were pursuing. For John, it showed the impact he was having, “Serving in youth ministry was impactful and it helped me further confirm that I wanted to be in ministry with youth.” For Kelly it reinforced her desire to work with kids, “It reinforced

that I wanted to work with kids and be a teacher.” For Collin, it helped build skills and provided tangible experiences, “I started learning video editing in high school. Volunteering in outreach ministry and helping do video projects made it clear that I wanted to major in this. School can teach you so much but a lot of video editing is self-taught.” Andy was able to see the joy he had in his major, “I really enjoyed learning about history and my professor made it fun.” While Larry shared how it further confirmed what he wanted to do, “I knew I wanted to study mechanical engineering before college and the seminar course confirmed that decision for me.” Mary and Rita both had impactful experiences that helped set them on the path towards their intended majors. “I volunteered as a translator for a mobile health unit for migrant farm workers. This work helped me realize I wanted to be in preventative health” (Rita, Interview). “I got to help do research for an organization to see where to open a new facility. I loved getting to talk to people and it helped me see that communication was the major I wanted to pursue” (Mary, Interview). Because of the overview style of the seminar courses in interest areas for majors, participants were able to get a glimpse into the field and confirm their pursuits or knew right away if they needed to change directions.

Though all participants had some aspect of a service learning or volunteer requirement in their seminar course, it did not always directly relate to the course or provide direction. Anna shared her seminar course required voluntary participation in research studies, Jacob’s course worked in a food bank, and Andy’s class did park clean up. Two participants were given options to select from in areas to participate in and the five other participants were told they had to find their own service site and choose areas they found interest in working.

Post-Graduation Education and Career Direction

The first subtheme related to the participant's choice of major, which all participants shared its impact. The second subtheme to emerge related to the need to obtain an advanced degree to pursue a desired career or the career direction participants went in. Four out of 10 participants have received an advanced degree. Andy recognized that he needed an advanced degree to go into the field of teaching since his bachelor's was in a different area. "My volunteering didn't have a big impact on my major but it did have an impact on my career" shared Andy when reflecting on the change of direction from a major in history to a master's in teaching. Andy continued to share, "I teach humanities, so I get to use my major all the time. It was tutoring kids and working at the boys and girls club that opened my eyes over time to being a teacher."

Three out of the four individuals who earned advanced degrees earned bachelor's degrees in their desired field. They earned advanced degrees to focus more on their fields and become better versed in their profession. These three individuals did service-learning experiences that related directly to their desired career field throughout their undergrad and helped solidify the desire to pursue an advanced degree. John studied religious studies and knew that he could learn more about being a pastor if he received a master's in pastoral studies. "If I wanted to be better equipped to be a pastor, I needed to learn more specifically how to do that" (Focus group one). Jacob and Kelly both sought advanced degrees in teaching fields. When asked to elaborate on why they sought an advanced degree, Jacob said, "In teaching we have tiers for pay and the more education you have they higher your pay is. I saw an opportunity to do a master's degree quickly and get a pay bump, so that's what I did" (Focus group two). Kelly shared:

I knew I wanted to keep advancing my education, so I worked towards a master's in teaching. It taught me more about being a teacher and how to do research as an educator. Eventually, I want to go for a doctorate and getting a master's was a stepping stone towards that goal. (Focus group two)

Four of the six individuals who have earned a bachelor's degree now have careers within the area they majored in. Though they may not have had a service learning experience directly related to their current career during their first year, they sought out opportunities throughout their undergraduate experience that related closely to their major. Larry shared about a trip to Alaska towards the end of his degree and the ways it brought further confirmation of the degree he was seeking and the work he could do post-graduation. "My Alaska trip opened my eyes to real-world problems in my field of engineering and showed me practical ways that I could solve them" (Larry, Interview). Anna shared:

I don't know if by the first year I really had much of a grip of what I wanted to do. I was definitely still exploring, but I was always gravitating towards what appeared to be "people focused" areas of study. Most of the time (in her service learning experiences and other volunteer opportunities) I found out it wasn't exactly what I was expecting, but thankfully I finally landed in a spot that seemed to click. (Interview)

Anna now works in human resources, which is people-focused and aligns with her major in business administration. Tracy talked about the connection between her major and her career stating, "My first year ended up being what I graduated with, though I took a detour with healthcare for a few years. My management career really is what kept me going in business" (Interview). Rita works in public health and shared about a pivotal moment that further confirmed her choice in major, sharing "I was taking disease epidemiology that semester and the

pandemic was official right before my midterms. That impacted my decision to pursue public health further” (Interview). Collin and Mary are the remaining people who hold bachelor’s degrees and currently hold jobs that do not have a direct relation to their major.

Growth as a Leader

The second theme to emerge was Growth as a Leader. Though a direct relation to leadership style was not found, qualities of leadership were shared by all participants. Many participants shared about leadership styles that were modeled for them at service sites or about individuals in leadership positions that had an impact on them personally. This is directly related to the theme of demonstrated Growth as a Leader. Within Growing as a Leader, two sub-themes emerged, growth in Personal Development and growth in Professional Development. Though similar, both are impactful and share the ways the participants grew in their understanding of leadership.

Personal Development

All participants described aspects of personal development that took place throughout their volunteer and service-learning opportunities. Tracy shared, “Volunteering helped teach me responsibility” (Interview). Mary talked about small changes that add up over time, stating, “It has taught me that even small changes can change the course of someone’s life for the better” (Interview). Andy discussed the ways he experienced leadership, sharing “Leadership is one of those things that can’t be taught, so much as experienced” (Interview). Rita shared about the logistical impacts she experienced, “It taught me about real-life situations. Things like how to manage my time, talk to patients, and public speaking” (Interview). Collin mentioned the ways he learned how to work on a team, “It helped me learn how to delegate tasks” (Interview). Larry shared about the examples he witnessed and the importance they have, “My experience in

volunteering has given me examples of how important effective communication is in leadership” (Interview). Not only was this shared in individual interviews, but participants also shared this growth within the focus groups. Kelly shared about watching teachers lead in their classroom, sharing “It really demonstrated the different types of leadership style and helped me understand what works better and what doesn’t” (Focus group two). Anna talked about the many leadership styles she experienced in various jobs and volunteering, stating “Participating in service activities showed me what strong leadership looked like and that vision is so helpful” (Focus Group #1). Andy shared about his volunteering with kids after school and working with leadership, “It definitely provided examples of how important effective communication is in leadership” (Focus group one). Jacob talked about being demonstrated responsibility, explaining “It also showed me how to lead others and how to take responsibility, even if it’s something that I failed at” (Focus group two). Regardless of the types of activities the participants participated in, either in their first year or throughout their volunteer experiences, they had shared experiences in the ways that the activities they participated in helped their personal development.

Leadership Development

In addition to personal development, participants shared the ways they experienced growth in their own leadership and the way it relates to their career direction. Mary shared what her focus is within leadership roles, “In leadership roles I try to focus on creating community for coworkers, clients, and supporters or donators as well” (Focus group two). Andy discussed aspects of his student teaching, sharing “It was interesting to see a wide variety of teaching styles. I definitely learned the kind of teacher I hoped to be and not to be” (Andy, Focus group one). Jacob talked about the continuation of skill development, stating, “It has helped me realize what it takes to lead others through a task to completion” (Jacob, interview). Kelly connected the

volunteer and service experiences she held and its relation to her career, “It set me up for success to be a leader. I started in a better spot than a lot of my peers because I had more experience with kids, even if it wasn't directly in a classroom environment” (Interview).

As conversations continued to progress towards where participants stand in their current career and volunteer positions, they shared the ways in which leadership was a continuous evolution. Ana shared about current experience in her career and volunteer leadership, sharing, “There are still boundaries that need to be followed, and people who will be disappointed with decisions from time to time” (Interview). Andy shared his own experiences being in leadership at his job, sharing:

There’s a trial and error component to it. A good leader I’ve found is always trying out new things and working to improve, but that’s going to come with mistakes, resets, and conflict. A great leader owns their mistakes, learns from them, and reaches out to those involved for feedback from their perspectives. I’ve learned a lot of this through the work I do each day. (Interview)

Mary mentioned the leadership style she feels is best, sharing, “Being exposed to much collaboration and community support, I have seen that inclusivity and acting as a mentor or coach is the best leadership style” (Interview). Rita talked about skills learned in her service-learning requirements and their impact on her career now, stating, “Some of the things I learned were how to talk and how to read people. It has helped me be able to get to leadership roles” (Focus group one). Larry talked about being able to shift the type of leader he is based on his circumstances:

I think there are many ways to be a leader, and through my volunteer work and beyond I’ve practiced several of those ways. Sometimes I am the “traditional” leader. I am in

front and commanding attention. Other times, I lead smaller groups of people. Other times, I lead by example or by serving others. (interview)

Again, though not always realized during the first-year service learning activity, continued volunteering helped the participants realize traits of leadership and direction of leadership that would be beneficial as they progressed from being college students to their careers.

Continued Service

In reviewing the timelines of each participant, it was evident that each member continued with aspects of volunteering and community service after their first-year service-learning experience, which led to a third theme from the participants, Continued Service. Some participants continued with the volunteering they did in their first year, like Andy who continued volunteering with kids at the Boys and Girls Club, or John who continued volunteering and serving with the youth ministry he found in his first year. Collin also continued service in youth ministry, working on his skills of video editing and production skills, which eventually led to a full-time job. Three of the 10 participants are teachers and they continued in various aspects of volunteering and service learning that better prepared them to be teachers, including their student teaching requirement to complete their degree. Eight out of the 10 participants continued doing service-related activities in areas that directly related to the careers they currently have.

Outlier Data and Findings

Throughout the research, one main outlier presented itself, which was the lack of consistent terminology among the participants. “I volunteered at a local food bank,” (Jacob, Interview). “I did community service through the youth ministry at the church I was attending,” (John, Interview). Though each participant had required service in their first-year experience course, each participant referred to it as something other than service-learning. This resulted in

having to discuss with participants what the meaning of service learning is and sharing additional related terms, such as volunteering and community service requirements. Once the terms were expanded, all participants shared they had some aspect of this requirement. In addition to the lack of consistent terminology, each participant had different requirements within their service requirement, ranging from a short experience to a semester-long experience. Based on the type of experience that was required within their first-year seminar course correlated with the type of, if any, reflective practices that took place within the classroom and various discussions around the service learning experiences.

Research Question Responses

This study examines one central research question and two sub-questions focused on the experiences of individuals who participated in service-learning during their first-year seminar course. This section addresses each research question based on the above data. It also applies the themes to the research questions they answer.

Central Research Question

The central research question was: What are the shared leadership experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning activities during their first-year courses? The participants' perspective was that leadership skills and traits were developed through various service activities, starting with activities in their first-year intro course. Participants also hold a shared trait of continued community service since their first year of college. Participants shared how the activities they participated in helped them to have a deeper understanding of the direction they wanted to go with their career and the type of leader they wanted to be, regardless of whether it was in their career or other volunteer activities. All three themes that were presented relate to the central research question and help answer that the experiences in their first year of student

resulted in a snowball effect of continued volunteering and viewing the leadership qualities of others. Tracy shared, “I think volunteering helps shape a person and it helped me see the type of leader I wanted to be. It also showed me that I could make an impact regardless of the role I am in” (Focus group two). Andy shared:

The opportunities I had opened me up to experiences others might not get. It helped me to see things in a new perspective and have a deeper understanding of what I want to do with my career and the type of leader I want to be to my students. (Focus group one)

Sub Question One

The first sub-question was: What are the active experimentation experiences of alumni who participated in first-year service-learning activities? As participants were found for the study, it was determined that a definition was needed to explain what active experimentation experiences were. Potential participants were told that active experimentation experiences could involve any type of volunteer or service requirement within the first-year seminar course, including but not limited to one-day experiences, course-long experiences, or varied experiences throughout the course. The experiences of the participants ranged from working with youth to volunteering at community resources. The participants shared the ways in which they served during their first year, with half of the participants working with youth either in a school setting, after school activities, or working in ministry at a church. They shared the progression of volunteering, many finding the ways in which their career was determined through the activities they were doing. Three of the 10 participants are currently educators and shared that working with kids helped solidify their desire to be in education. Others talked about how their experiences showed them what they wanted to do and what they determined was not the career path for them. All three themes helped answer this sub-question. Both subthemes within the

theme Shaped by Experience allowed participants to discuss what their service-learning activity was during their first-year seminar course and the impact it had, resulting in the subthemes Major Direction and Solidification and Post Graduation Education and Career Direction. The theme Growth as a Leader had a direct relation to the sub-question in the sub-theme Personal Growth. Within the theme Continued Service, participants noted the ways in which they continued to volunteer after their initial service-learning activity which initiated their timeline activity.

Sub Question Two

The second sub-question was: What are the reflection experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning activities in their first-year courses? From what was gleaned from the participants, the reflective practices varied in presentation. Some participants had reflective practices that allowed them to journal, others were able to discuss in small groups during class time, while a majority were not given opportunities to reflect during the class. Of those who did not receive opportunities to reflect, many found ways to reflect that were outside the classroom. Andy shared, “We would talk to the kids club staff after the kids left to process things. Like if a kid seemed to be struggling or something was going on” (Interview). Kelly shared, “I did self-reflection to see the impact of what I was doing and how it was impactful to other people. It helped me see how sharing someone’s story impacts others and impacts yourself” (Interview). The shared meaning that presented was the lack of consistent reflective practices with service-learning activities, meaning that participants had to find their own way to reflect on what they were doing and the impact it was having on their lives. This is demonstrated through the responses that came about within the theme Growth as a Leader, where participants discussed within both sub-themes their Personal Growth and Professional Growth, demonstrating the ways they took what they learned in their experiences and grew in a forward motion. The lack of

reflective practices and inconsistencies are noted within the Outlier Data section, as there were inconsistencies in the reflective practices and definition of service-learning.

Summary

This chapter discussed the participants in the study followed by the themes that emerged from the data. This study included ten participants who had a service-learning component in their first-year seminar program. The first theme that was discussed was how participants were shaped by their experiences. This theme included the subthemes of major direction and solidification and post-graduation education and career direction. The second theme was growth as a leader, which included the subthemes of personal development and leadership development. The final theme discussed was the continued service of the participants. After the themes were shared, the chapter discussed the outlier data and findings from the research. The chapter concluded with discussing the ways the research related to the central research question and the two sub-questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the leadership experiences of alumni who completed an undergraduate program with a first-year service-learning component. Chapter Five includes a discussion of the findings, including the implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, and the limitations and delimitations. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and an overall summary conclusion.

Discussion

This study explored the lived experiences of individuals who participated in a required service-learning activity as part of their first-year seminar course during their undergraduate studies. Through the triangulated data sources of timeline collection, interviews, and focus groups, the shared experiences of the participants were categorized into the following three themes: (a) Shaped by Experience, (b) Growth as a Leader, and (c) Continued Service. This section discusses the study's findings in relation to the above themes and supports the critical discussion of those findings with the empirical and theoretical literature. The discussion includes implications for policy or practice, empirical and theoretical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Three themes were identified in this study. The first theme was Shaped by Experience, sharing the ways each participant was impacted by their unique service-learning experiences. This theme had two subthemes, Major Direction and Solidification and Post Graduation Education and Career Direction. The second theme was Growth as a Leader, sharing the qualities

and traits of leadership experienced by each participant. This theme had two subthemes, Personal Development and Leadership Development. The final theme was Continued Service, noting the ways participants have continued to serve past the required experience for the study. The interpretations are identified and discussed below.

Critical Discussion

Immersion in the data and an understanding of the shared experience of participants reveals several critical findings. First, there is inconsistent use of terminologies and practices of service-learning pedagogy (Griffiths & Norman, 2021; Hollander et al., 2020). One of the significant points of service-learning is the noteworthy impact it has in the classroom and on student development, which must be understood by faculty members using service-learning in their classrooms (Cress et al., 2013). Having faculty members understand basic terminology and practices allows for a shared understanding of best practices and equivalent experiences among students. Participants shared the difference in terminology that was used in their first-year course, which inhibited a clear initial understanding of the term service-learning. Because of this, I had to provide more explanation for what encompassed service learning for the interest survey.

The terminology used for service-learning was not the only variation students experienced. Although each participant had some element of service-learning component in their first-year introduction course, they varied in what the expectations were, the length of time the service was, if the service was self-selected or pre-selected (Cress et al., 2013). Though the expectations of service requirements do vary between the course and faculty member, it was important to note that it also varied in the types of reflective practices that took place, with the realization that reflective practices were not being used in most instances. Reflective practices provide an intentional space for service-learning participants to find a connection between what

they are doing at their service site and the learning taking place in the classroom, as well as providing space for future directives (Damons & Dunbar-Krige, 2020; Kawai, 2021; Kolb 1984). Inconsistent or absent reflection practices are a deviation from the service-learning pedagogy, as reflective practices are a cornerstone of service learning and set it apart from simple community service (Celio et al., 2011; Cress et al., 2013). Though the service is significant, the act of reflective practices provides the link between what is taking place at the service site and the learning within the classroom, especially by using methods like the DEAL model or Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (Bettencourt, 2015; Molee et al., 2011). Although there is a lack of consistency in terminology and reflection practices, participants did see meaningful outcomes from these experiences.

This study found that as service-learning fostered participants' growth as leaders, it also cultivated their sense of belonging in their institution, community, and chosen professions. A sense of belonging is established when an individual feels they have value to the stakeholder (Tinto, 2017). Participants collectively shared about the positive ways that the service in their introductory class impacted their growth, both as a leader and in their career direction, which was a consistent theme. This data models the outcome of the cultivation of their skills in learning, leadership, and career potential (Griffith & Clark, 2016; Schalge et al., 2018). Participants felt a connection to the institution and community, as well as the ability to try on the major they thought they wanted to pursue. The model that the research site uses allows students to select a first-year introductory course to participate in with a service-learning component to the course. Allowing this type of selection for their first-year seminar created a sense of meaning and connection for the students at the beginning of their undergraduate education (Ahadi et al., 2019; García-Ros et al., 2018). Participants selected an introductory course in their major interest

area. In turn, they were able to be exposed to the potential careers and outcomes from earning that major, as well as meeting others with a similar interest in the major. Many of the participants found that the major they selected was what they wanted to pursue, while others took more of a roundabout way to find where they wanted to go. Literature asserts this is the beginning of socialization, which is the introduction to an institution, department, or potential career's values and skills and incorporates these practices into their own lives (Goodfellow, 2014). Based on the experiences shared by participants, their experience in the first-year service learning began the process of socialization as professionals in their field.

Service learning left a lasting impression on participants' identities. Every participant continued serving in some capacity throughout their undergraduate career, either in their original service site or in other areas of interest throughout their degree. This also led participants to want to continue to service in some capacity after their undergraduate experience. This shows the impact and importance that service has in these individuals' lives, not only to advance their own understanding, but to be an active member of society (Drinkard & Tontodonato, 2019; Salam et al., 2019). The acts of service helped refine their desire to achieve a certain degree and see the ways it could impact others, not just themselves. Participants shared about knowing what they wanted to major in and solidifying that desire or refining it based on their service experiences. Participants also learned about the types of leaders they wanted to be and realized what strong leadership looked like (Huda et al., 2018; Jacques et al., 2016). As they have continued to serve after their time in undergrad, some participants have found themselves in service leadership roles and are taking what they learned during their various experiences and applying it to leading others in service. They have also allowed the aspects of leadership that they have learned through service learning and continued service to impact the ways they lead in their career. All these

aspects point towards answering the central research question of what are the shared leadership experiences of alumni who participated in service-learning activities during their first-year course? The participants learned traits of being a leader and found themselves wanting to continue to serve, even after the requirement ended. Their desire to give back is strong and it is evident that it comes from a strong foundation of being offered an opportunity to serve others.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This study identified implications for policy and practice which included recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders in higher education. The specific implications for policy relate to the professional development of faculty teaching service-learning to ensure consistent terminology. The identified implications for both policy and practice are discussed below.

Implications for Policy

The policy implications from this study revolve around the education and consistency of faculty members at the site. It was found through the study that a lack of service-learning pedagogy is used, resulting in many different interpretations of what service-learning is and the ways it is implemented in the classroom. Having a consistent set of guidelines and regulations for service-learning pedagogy will allow each first-year student to have a similar experience when participating in service-learning activities in their introductory course (Cress et al., 2011, 2013). Though each experience will be different, holding a standard for reflective practices and connection to the introduction course allows for consistent methods for all students (Celio et al., 2011; Cress et al., 2013). Institutions could consider a policy that requires training for faculty members to attend prior to teaching a first-year introductory course with a service-learning component. Additional service-learning professional development should take place at the

beginning of each year as a refresher course for faculty who continue to teach the introductory course. Creating and maintaining professional development around service-learning allows for consistency in terminology, reflection opportunities, and best practices (Pawlowski, 2018; Preradovic & Stark, 2019). Participation in these professional developments should be part of an institution's policies regarding service-learning.

Implications for Practice

Based on the literature review and findings, the study has practical implications. It is evident that consistency in terminology and service-learning pedagogy is needed for consistency (Fink, 2013; Griffith & Clark, 2016). Having faculty members attend a workshop or training around best practices in service learning would help maintain a standard of practice across an institution (Pawlowski, 2018; Preradovic & Stark, 2019). Maintaining a set guide or standards that are required for introductory courses with a service-learning component ensures that every instructor teaching such a course is aware of the requirements and standards (Preradovic & Stark, 2019; Stewart, 2012). These types of trainings and consistency in terminology may also be helpful for other institutions looking to include similar practices into their first-year seminar programs.

Additional implications for practice revolve around the students' experience. First, institutions should consider encouraging students to choose a service-learning site or activity that relates to their intended major. Allowing students to select a site that has direct, or indirect, relation to their intended major provides an opportunity for career exploration and experience. (Harkins et al., 2018; Wheat et al., 2019). The second implication for practice is the consideration of additional integration of service-learning past the first-year experience. Doing so allows for continued career exploration and skill set building, including gaining leadership

qualities (Schalge et al., 2018; Wheat et al., 2019). The third implication for practice revolves around the integration of intentional reflection that takes place regularly. Reflection practices are the foundation of service learning and allow students to process what they are experiencing, draw connections to their learning and lived experiences, and allows them to explore new ideas (Pawlowski, 2018; Preradovic & Stark, 2019).

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This section addresses both the empirical and theoretical implications of the study. The themes that emerged from the study describe the significance of students participating in first-year experience programs with service-learning components and confirm Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory that guided this study. This study builds on the literature related to service learning and first-year experiences and the findings intersect service learning and literature on the sense of belonging.

Empirical Implications

This study builds on the existing literature of service-learning and first-year experience programs. The value of service-learning was found in the ways that participants were able to see the benefit and meaning of what they were doing (Cress et al., 2013; Drinkard & Tontodonato, 2010). The literature shared aspects of the depths of service-learning, highlighting the ways that service learning provides an increased development outcome, supports leadership development, and creates a desire for continued service (Fink, 2013; Huda et al., 2018). The theme of Shaped by Experience supports the literature in the way that it influenced the direction of major selection, as well as career direction and continued education. The literature states that participants in service learning develop personal and professional skills, including communication with peers and site supervisors, learn how to work with community partners, and

learn how to empower others (Ahadi et al., 2019; Cress et al., 2013; Harkins et al., 2018; Wheat et al., 2019).

Participants discussed the ways their leadership skills were developed through their service-learning experiences and the impact it has had on their lives and professional careers, which led to the second theme of Growth as a Leader (Fink, 2013; Huda et al., 2018). These experiences allowed them to connect with their campus and engage in other service-type activities, as well as the skills they learned and the degree they wanted to pursue (Hickinbottom-Brawn & Burns, 2015; McClushkey et al., 2019). The connection between what they were learning and the real-world experiences was evident in the things participants shared and how they grew personally and professionally (Toews & Cerny, 2006; Wheat et al., 2019). This connects to the existing literature on student development through service-learning and increasing retention and engagement with the institution (McCluskey et al., 2019; Wheat et al., 2019).

The consistent theme of Continued Service supports the current literature on the lasting implications of service-learning. The seeds of civic responsibility were planted during the initial service-learning requirement, generating an organic desire to continue in service (Harkins et al., 2018; Wheat et al., 2019). From the continuation of service, growth within the service site took place, allowing for skills development and increased responsibility (Howe et al., 2014; Wheat et al., 2019). Some participants shared how they are now overseeing volunteers and leading teams in service projects, which relates back to the subthemes of Leadership Development and Personal Development.

The findings of the study also intersect with several areas of literature that were not previously explored, service learning and sense of belonging and service learning and

socialization. The limited literature that explores the impact that service-learning has on students' sense of belonging notes that increased service-learning does generate this response (Pichon, 2021; York & Fernandez, 2018). Yet not much is available on the intersection of service learning and socialization, except in the exploration of political socialization. This study suggests that service learning intersects with belonging and socialization because of the ways it fosters a sense of belonging and begins the steps of socialization. Participants expressed how they felt a sense of belonging to their institution, community, and to their profession because of their service-learning experiences.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework for the study was Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. The two areas of focus from Kolb's theory that guided this study were active experimentation and reflective observations. Though participants did not have concrete reflective practices, many did reflect on their own about the impact their service was having, either in their own lives or at the site they were serving. The act of reflection allows individuals to see and understand the impact they are having and how it relates back to what they are learning (Cress et al., 2013; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). Though there was a lack of formal reflection, participants were able to generate this practice on their own and let it guide the direction in their major decision and career direction. The second area of focus from Kolb was active experimentation. Every participant shared about their trial-and-error process, learning and determining if the major they selected was the direction they wanted to go and the ways they sought after real-world experiences in potential careers to determine if they wanted to pursue it (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015; Petkus, 2000). By exploring the ways an initial service-learning activity

impacted participants, it solidified the continuous cycle of Kolb's theory and the ways it continues to work past the initial experiences.

There are additional theories that are linked to the study. The theory of student persistence by Tinto (2017) explores the connection between a student's academic and social integration with an institution and their ability to persist. This study has implications related to Tinto's theory because service-learning is a social integration activity and when it is linked to a student's major, it becomes linked to academic integration as well. Chickering's (1969) theory of identity development can also be linked to the study, specifically the final three of the seven vectors: Establishing Identity, Developing Purpose, and Developing Integrity. These three vectors are displayed in the growth and development of participants throughout their continued service during their undergraduate and as they continued with service post-graduation.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations were found in the study. The limitations included inconsistent terminology, participant recruitment, design, and sample size. The Delimitation of the study is the limited sample size, participant criteria, design choice, and the institution chosen. Both limitations and delimitations are discussed below.

Limitations

Limitations within a study are potential weaknesses that are outside the control of the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). There were several limitations to the study. The first was the inconsistency of terminology that was used by the participants. It was found during the participant selection period that each participant had a different terminology used for the act of service-learning within the classroom. Due to this nature, it was needed to expand on what service-learning was, expanding the used terminology to community service, volunteerism,

required service, and service-learning. Typically, in qualitative research limited framing is provided to participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the lack of consistent terminology, an explanation for participants on what service learning could include and the various names it could be considered were needed. Careful consideration was given to the information provided so as not to lead participants. The second limitation was in gaining participants. Though the study took place at a large institution, gaining participants was challenging and resulted in a limited sample size. Gaining participants was challenging and contributed to finding participants via LinkedIn and utilizing direct invitations to participate. The use of LinkedIn could have skewed the sample, as only individuals who intentionally created a LinkedIn page and specified their attendance at the site were targeted.

Delimitations

Delimitations are conscious limits set by the researcher, creating boundaries for the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The delimitations of the study are the sample size and pool in which the sample was gathered. The study held a sample size of 10 participants, leaving room for future studies to include a larger pool. The sample size was from the same institution and had a requirement for having participated in a first-year introduction course with a service-learning component. An additional delimitation was the design of the study being a transcendental phenomenology. Though epoché was practiced, it is not possible to completely bracket out all bias. Personal bias was protected against and it is a delimitation of design that was chosen because it does allow for personal interpretation from the researcher.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the study's limitations and delimitations, there are a few recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is to conduct a case study on the professional

development of faculty members seeking to teach service learning in their classrooms. With the varied terminology used by faculty and lack of reflection practices, a case study into the effectiveness of professional development for service learning and its impact on students should be considered. A second recommendation is a longitudinal study that examines students' sense of belonging or attitudes towards community engagement before, during, and after service learning, as well as again at the end of their undergraduate degree. Though this study found aspects of a sense of belonging and socialization were taking place, a full study to explore students' sense of belonging and attitudes toward service learning would add to the literature. A third recommendation is a phenomenological study examining all four constructs of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory to further investigate service learning as it relates to first year students. An additional recommendation is a grounded theory study on reflective practices in first year service learning to develop a model that can be applied to any service-learning opportunity taking place in a first-year experience course.

Conclusion

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the leadership experiences of 10 alumni who completed an undergraduate program with a first-year service-learning component. The theoretical framework for the study was Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. Data collected from timeline creation, individual interviews, and focus groups were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The findings revealed that there is an inconsistent use of terminology around service-learning but there is a significant impact from service-learning on the direction of participants' major selection, career selection, and continued service. It is recommended that future research explore the implementation of professional development around best practices in service learning for faculty members teaching a service-learning course, as well as methods for

meaningful reflection. “As freshmen, we go in thinking we want to do one thing and it could change at any time. Being able to volunteer really allows us to see types of jobs and the impact we could have” (John, Interview).

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[Appendix A](#)

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 8, 2022

Jennifer Wilson
Kristy Motte

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-425 Leadership development through service-learning for first-year students: A phenomenological study

Dear Jennifer Wilson, Kristy Motte,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Site Approval

[External] RE: Doctoral Research Survey Request

[REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

Fri 5/6/2022 2:20 PM

To:

Wilson, Jennifer Elizabeth <[REDACTED]>

You don't often get email from [REDACTED]. [Learn why this is important](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

I am sorry for the delay in responding You can post on the [REDACTED] Alumni Facebook page and the [REDACTED] Alumni LinkedIn page.

[REDACTED]

From: Wilson, Jennifer Elizabeth <jewilson4@liberty.edu> **Sent:** Friday, May 6, 2022 11:40 AM **To:** [REDACTED] Alumni Association <kualumni@ku.edu> **Subject:** Re: Doctoral Research Survey Request

Hello,

I am following up on my email sent a week ago. Can I please get an update on the request? I would love to connect with someone and discuss my research and this possibility. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Jenn Wilson Brown

206.484.0293

From: Wilson, Jennifer Elizabeth **Sent:** Wednesday, April 27, 2022 5:06 PM **To:** [REDACTED]
Subject: Doctoral Research Survey Request8/11/22, 12:39 PM Mail - Wilson, Jennifer Elizabeth - Outlook

[REDACTED]

Hello! I hope this message finds you well. My name is Jenn Brown, I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am doing my research on the leadership development of students during their first year of undergraduate by interviewing recent alumni about their experiences. In my research, I have found your institution to be one that incorporates service-learning into the first-year experience program. I would like to ask permission to post a survey on your alumni Facebook page to see if any of your alumni are interested in participating in my research. Please let me know if this is possible. If it is, I will be in touch after my IRB approval to provide the actual post. Thank you for your consideration and I hope you have a wonderful day!

Jenn Wilson Brown

Appendix C

Invitation to Participate

Facebook and LinkedIn post that will be posted by the Alumni Center:

Hello! My name is Jennifer Wilson and I am a Ph.D. student at Liberty University. As part of my dissertation, I am doing research on the first-year seminar courses [REDACTED] specifically in regard to the service-learning activities. I am researching the ways that service-learning impacted your leadership experiences. I am looking for participants who have graduated with a bachelor's degree in the last five years. If you are interested in participating in my research, please follow the link below to complete a demographic and interest survey. Thank you!

Appendix D

Demographic and Interest Survey

Survey/Questionnaire Questions

1. Have you completed the consent form for participating in the survey?
2. What experience have you had with service-learning at your undergraduate institution?
3. Did you participate in service-learning opportunities during your first year?
4. If yes, please describe the service-learning experience.
5. In your service-learning reflective practices, please describe how you feel you grew as a leader.
6. In what ways have you had experience with leadership development during your undergraduate career?
7. Did your experience with leadership development take place during your service-learning activities in your first year?
8. Are you willing to be interviewed based on your past experiences with service-learning activities and leadership development during your first year of undergraduate?
9. Are you willing to participate in a focus group, sharing your experiences with others who have had similar experiences?
10. Are you willing to participate in journal prompts, providing detailed information about your experience of service-learning during your first year of undergraduate?

Appendix E

Contact Email for Timeline and Digital Data Collection with Instructions

Hello <Name>,

Thank you for your interested in my research for my Ph.D. dissertation. I am thankful for your willingness to participate. Before setting up an interview, I would like to invite you to complete a timeline of your service-learning and leadership experiences. I request that the timeline be completed in two weeks, emailing it back to me by (insert date here).

For the timeline, please start with your first year of college, including your first-year seminar course. Provide details on your service-learning project and course name or subject area. Continue the timeline including all leadership experiences and service-learning experiences throughout your undergraduate career, as well as volunteer opportunities. As you continue the timeline, please include leadership opportunities with your career path or graduate studies, as well as continued volunteer work and service-learning activities (if applicable). The timeline will end with your present-day leadership roles and volunteer responsibilities. Your timeline can be completed in any manner, including but not limited to a bullet point list on a word document or a hand drawn timeline. Please send along any photos you have from your experiences that you would like to share.

All information you share will be kept on a password protected computer and stored in a google account specific for the research. If you have any hesitation or would like more information on the security used for your timeline and photos, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding the timeline exercise. Thank you for your time and I look forward to setting up an interview with you after receiving your timeline!

Thanks,

Jennifer Wilson

Appendix F

Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Wilson Brown, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, graduated in the last five years (2017–2023 graduation dates), completed all four years of your undergraduate studies at the [REDACTED], and participated in the first-year experience program during your freshman year. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand the leadership development experiences of first-year undergraduate students who participated in service learning.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a timeline from your first year of undergrad to today, including information on leadership opportunities and service-learning opportunities you have participated in. The estimated time is 30–60 minutes.
2. Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview will be recorded and will be an estimated time of 60 minutes.
3. Participate in a focus group with other participants in the study. Everyone will be asked to select a fake name to protect privacy. The focus group will be recorded and will be an estimated time of 60 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous/will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer within a password-locked Google drive. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer, within a password-locked Google drive for five years and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the [REDACTED]. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer Wilson Brown. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix G

Contact Email for Focus Group and Interview

Interview contact email:

Hello <Name>,

Thank you for your interested in my research for my Ph.D. dissertation. I am thankful for your willingness to participate. I would like to invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview with me. The interview will take place on Zoom. The dates and times available for an interview are: (provide dates and times). The interview will take no longer than one hour to complete.

Please send me two to three times that work best for your schedule. Once we have a confirmed date, I will provide you with a calendar invite and the Zoom link. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding setting up an interview. Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting you!

Thanks,

Jennifer Wilson

Focus group contact email:

Hello <Name>,

Thank you for your participation in an individual interview and research thus far. I am thankful for your willingness to participate. I would like to invite you to participate in a focus. The focus group will include 4-6 individuals and myself. The focus group will take place on Zoom. The dates and times for the focus group will be determined using a doodle poll. Please complete the poll here with your available days and times ([Link to doodle poll](#)). The focus group

will take no longer than one hour to complete. Once we have a confirmed date and time that works best for the group, I will provide you with a calendar invite and the Zoom link. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding setting up a focus group. Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting with you again!

Thanks,

Jennifer Wilson