An Exploration of Community College Students’ Experiences with a Leadership Program

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Abstract

Through the analysis of qualitative data, this interpretative phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of community college students to gain an understanding of how they perceived their participation in leadership training. The research draws on the data gathered from in-depth interviews with three community college students attending a public institution in the northeastern United States. Utilizing student development theory as a theoretical framework, this study provided rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences following leadership training and the sense they constructed from their experiences. The emergent themes produced by this study included (1) sense of belonging and positive relationships, (2) increased self-confidence, (3) increased self-awareness and self-monitoring, (4) understanding of personal identity, and (5) willingness to take initiative. This study served as a step to further understand the community college demographic participating in leadership training as there is an inherent lack of empirical literature in this realm. Based on student perceptions, the findings of this phenomenological study suggest leadership training can provide great benefits for community college students.

Keywords: interpretative phenomenological analysis, leadership development, community college students, student involvement, student engagement
Dedication

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my family and friends, particularly my two loving parents. Without my mother and father continuously supporting me in all endeavors, I would not have gained the strength to persist in such a rigorous journey. The resilience you have both demonstrated and the sacrifices you have made to make sure our family always had the best of everything, are qualities I can only hope to some day exhibit.

Additionally, this study is dedicated to my best friend, and life partner, Amy. I know it has not been easy “sharing me” with my doctoral work and my love for my career, but please know your undying love and support is cherished. Without your unconditional love and genuine support for all of my ambitions, I would not be the man I am today.

Finally, this doctoral thesis is dedicated to all of the former, current, and future students of the leadership program selected for this study. Without your energy, enthusiasm, devotion, and willingness to become a better leader, this project would not have been possible. The leadership program was designed specifically to meet the needs of the community college population; as such, it is clear the initiative has served as a foundation to establish a family of student leaders. Thank you all for the many “teachable moments” and everlasting memories.
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Chapter I
Introduction

Students are leaving college just as fast as they are enrolling. Nowhere is this of more concern than at the community college level where students are a high-risk group by definition. Community college students are in jeopardy of dropping out of school at an alarming rate and continue to lose their way when immersed in society (Silverman, Alaibadi, & Stiles, 2010). According to Schneider and Yin’s (2011) report, the attrition rate for first-year community college students was approximately sixteen percent in the United States from 2006 to 2011. Since an estimated fifty percent of all college students are enrolled at community colleges (Astin, 1993), persistence rates are extremely important. Silverman, et al., (2010) posited that many possible rationales exist for this epidemic, including financial burdens, family crises, proximity, and a lack of connection with a given institution. It is the latter reason for attrition that is the primary focus of this study. Through student involvement and engagement, students can become more connected to an institution. Studies have demonstrated that the more actively engaged students were with their peers, faculty, and staff, the more likely they were to learn and stay in college until they achieved their academic goals (Kuh, 2001). Kuh (2001) also suggested that, through participation in a student leadership program, students can become actively engaged and see an increase in a variety of personal, social, and academic skills. This is the primary reason for a recent increase in student leadership programs at the community college level. The popularity of such programs at this level comes without concrete understanding of the impact on student engagement (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1990; Greenleaf, 1977). This study sought to understand the impact of a student leadership program on community college students.
In a time when monetary resources at all colleges, particularly at state-supported institutions, are ever decreasing, it is important to advocate for the existence of a leadership program that requires ongoing and significant funding to remain effective. The advocating goes beyond state boards and administrators of colleges, as the important stakeholders in a student leadership program are the participants. This study was necessary to demonstrate the importance of physical and psychological energetic immersion into a program to gain the desired outcome of leadership development and a connection to the institution.

**Practical Goals**

The researcher’s practical goals for designing a qualitative study of participants in a community college student leadership program were two-fold. It was initially important when speaking with students and administrators to articulate the importance of a student leadership program at the community college level, as a majority of the empirical research involves four-year colleges and universities. Additionally, it was of great importance to understand students’ experiences from participation in leadership activities provided through such a program. Further, the researcher sought to understand the impact of leadership programs on community college students in order to share the findings with colleagues and incoming students alike. Even more intriguing, there are only a handful of student leadership programs at the community college level in the United States. This compares to the estimated one thousand or more at four-year institutions (Scott, 2004), a fact that places the researcher’s study on the cutting edge in an area assessing the impact of such a program.

Additional rationale for this study came from experts in the field of student leadership programming. In her thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of Maryland, Haber (2006) reaffirmed the gap found in the current literature by recommending further research be done with
community college students. In addition to work with the community college student population, Haber (2006) went on to advocate for research to be conducted in a qualitative manner to understand the impact of leadership programs on leadership outcomes (p. 205).

Further, Haber (2006) explained:

…there is little information known about the context, focus, or structure of these [leadership] programs. Addressing leadership training and education programs in capacities other than program duration, such as focus and program components, can help better understand these programs and their effectiveness. (pp. 205-206)

Haber (2006) went on to recommend further examination of different leadership training and education programs. The implications from Haber’s (2006) study were taken into great consideration given the validity of the study and the breadth and depth of leadership knowledge her faculty advisor has demonstrated. Haber’s thesis was directed by Dr. Susan R. Komives, who is a renowned researcher, author, presenter, and professor in the area of leadership development. Research recommendations from Haber (2006) validated the researcher’s original focus for this study.

Members of the NHTI Student Leadership Team, an advisory and programmatic consulting advisory committee, seek to better understand the components of their student leadership program. As the chair of the Student Leadership Team, the researcher has a vested interest in understanding students’ experiences as they relate to leadership outcomes gained from participation in the leadership program. Further, the practical goal that Maxwell (2005) spoke about within the researcher’s area of interest is the importance to other people. Now that the study has been completed, the results can assist in establishing a cohesive student leadership curriculum for other leadership program administrators, which could possibly affect thousands of
people in a positive manner. This study aimed to add new knowledge in the ranks of community college student leadership programs by understanding and communicating participants’ experiences from such training.

In relation to this topic, the researcher wanted to become more informed regarding the outcomes of student leadership programming for community college students. At NHTI, Concord’s Community College within the Community College System of New Hampshire, the researcher is the Director of Student Life. The Student Life Office oversees the student leadership program. Regionally and nationally, the researcher serves on many pertinent advisory boards related to leadership programming which added to the overall interest level for this study. His relevant prior experiences that have shaped thinking surrounding student leadership include various presentations and attendance at national and international student leadership conferences. Additional experience with designing and creating a student leadership program has been particularly appropriate for this study. It became quite clear after reviewing the literature that a study in the area of leadership training and involvement at the community college level was necessary.

**Intellectual Goals**

The intellectual goal maintained by the researcher was to understand community college students’ experiences from participation in a student leadership program. There is a plethora of scholarly literature that supports engagement activities and involvement (Astin, 1993; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996; Tinto, 2004) but very little surrounding the impact on community college students, who are the most at-risk population of all college students (Silverman et al., 2010). This intellectual goal directly related to the researcher’s practical goals since an understanding of the impact of a student leadership program is identified, and the results are
being utilized to further enhance the existing leadership program. These results were formulated to present recommendations for a comprehensive student leadership program across community college campuses in New Hampshire, and will be offered to others beyond the state where replication is desirable. The program, as a result, will coherently become a summation of the themes from interviews that provided the data to answer the open-ended questions formulated from the intellectual goal.

**Research Question**

The research question that drove this study of community college students’ experiences with a leadership program was “how do community college students perceive and describe their experiences with leadership training?” The researcher’s question provided a foundation for inquiry while analyzing both the level of engagement of community college students and the influence of leadership training.

This doctoral thesis is organized in a sequential method in order to attain the desired outcomes of the study. The presentation of this paper initially includes the reasoning for use of the theoretical lens selected, complete with an outline of pertinent aspects of the theory. Chapter II is a discussion of relevant literature, immediately followed by an explanation and reasoning for the selected study design, including a thorough description of the methodology employed and limitations of the study in Chapter III. Chapter IV includes a discussion of the findings and results, and the study concludes with a chapter comprised of a summary complete with recommendations for further research.

**Theoretical Framework**

Student engagement, involvement, and leadership among college students are broad areas of concern. It is for this reason the researcher narrowed the focus of the study by honing in on a
few aspects of student life with some guidance of a theoretical framework. College is a time for students to learn about themselves, including their feelings, achievements, emotions, independence, identity, and other aspects of their psyche during the transitional years. In order to effectively understand the outcomes of leadership programs, it was important to look more specifically at college students’ development.

An appropriate lens through which to view the problem of practice was student development theory. Chickering’s student development theory was originally developed in 1969 to help define and understand college student development. In his later work, in collaboration with Dean Linda Reisser of Rockland Community College, Chickering and Reisser (1993) reaffirmed the relevance of the seven vectors in appraising college student identity through emotional, physical, social, and intellectual means. There were some minor changes made to the original theory that created some new constructs within the seven vectors, and even renamed and reordered some of the vectors. Though the foundation stayed primarily the same, there is more emphasis placed on interdependence and relationships while broadening the focus on students’ sense of self (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). It is for this reason the 1993 version of Chickering’s student development theory was selected for this study.

Another pertinent change to Chickering’s theory after more than twenty years of existence is the understanding that it was originally designed to evaluate college students, though its use could be more widely adapted (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Maintaining the focus on college students, Garfield and David (1986) supported the use of Chickering’s seven vectors of development, as colleges sought to help students develop their full potential. The researcher utilized the most updated version of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) student development theory in order to view the problem of practice.
In selecting a theoretical framework within student development, there are two routes that could have been taken: psychosocial and cognitive. Cognitive approaches to understanding student development are based primarily in the reconstruction of feelings and beliefs or values. The cognitive tenet within student development theory is highlighted in Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Perhaps more pertinent to the work of a student leadership program administrator is a psychosocial view of the problem of practice, which includes analyzing behavior of thinking in organized steps and stages. This model is apparent in Chickering’s seven vectors of development organized within the student development theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

**Chickering’s seven vectors.**

The first vector within Chickering’s developmental theory is entitled *Developing Competence*. This vector places a great emphasis on intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal competence. Reisser (1995) explained the three areas of intellectual competence to be (a) the acquisition of subject matter; (b) the growth of intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic sophistication; and (c) changes in ways of knowing and reasoning. In summation, the intellectual goal of the first vector is to attain premiere critical thinking abilities (Reisser, 1995). Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained with great emphasis that developing intellectual competence includes having the ability to analyze and synthesize material while including more points of view.

Physical and manual competence is aimed more at being athletic or having the ability to achieve artistic prominence. This may include, but is not limited to, creating tangible items, achieving physical fitness, self-discipline and self-control, and having a sense of
competitiveness. These physical attributes are on full display for approval by others. Further, physical and manual competence includes an element of creativity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Interpersonal competence within the first vector includes skills such as listening, cooperating, and communicating effectively. Additionally, interpersonal skills are deepened to include being in tune with others’ feelings and current state while having the ability to respond to their needs. Understanding and inclusion are also encompassed within the final aspect of vector one, as their importance is apparent when aligning goals of a group with those of an individual as a strategy to support others and their development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Vector two according to Chickering and Reisser (1993) is Managing Emotions. This particular vector lends itself to the inclusion of community college students as Chickering and Reisser (1993) expanded on Chickering’s original work to include the trials and tribulations of returning adult students to college. This was primarily because age does not necessarily correlate directly to emotional maturity (Reisser, 1995). Emotion management of all college students—immediately out of high school or otherwise—includes such feelings as fear, anxiety, anger, boredom, depression, guilt, and shame. These emotions have the power to detract from education while at college if they are untreated or become excessive.

The second vector places great emphasis on the awareness of the aforementioned emotions and the management of them through knowledge and recognition. These emotions can and should be treated as signals in which to seek a better understanding. Development can occur when students direct the emotions properly via acceptance of the fact that some emotion is good and can have a positive impact if harnessed correctly. Chickering and Reisser (1993) recommend utilizing self-regulation in an effort not to be too emotional, but to remain cognizant of such emotions. Coping with these emotions is critical for students to fully develop within
vector two. Striking a balance between assertiveness and defensiveness is recommended in addition to bonding when working as part of a larger group (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Vector three is titled *Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence*. This vector’s name has been changed since the original model in 1969 to emphasize interdependence. This reinforces the belief that one can attain emotional autonomy while still relying on others for support (Gilligan, 1992). Movement through autonomy requires both emotional and instrumental independence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) described instrumental independence as being able to create an idea and implement the plan through action. Success in vector three relies on being free from the constant seeking of approval or affection. Additionally, separation from dependence on peers and family for unwavering support and the ability to take risks to pursue interests and convictions is an indicator of independence.

The third vector includes the ability to revise relationships with peers and family, particularly with parents, as autonomy culminates. New relationships are forged with the ideals of reciprocity and equality at the foundation. Other considerations are given to the community, society as a whole, and the greater good of the world. Interdependence means respecting the autonomy of others while constantly seeking ways to collaborate with an increasing group of peers (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Vector four of Chickering’s student development theory is coined *Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships*. Reisser (1995) recognized relationships provide powerful learning experiences for students—male and female—about feelings, communication, self-esteem, and values. One of the primary functions of colleges and universities is to promote acceptance of differences, which can be done through relationship and acceptance building (Reisser, 1995). Developing mature relationships constitutes the appreciation of difference and tolerance of
diversity. Relationship building also includes the ability to attain intimacy with others in an effort to establish a bond.

Respecting differences and embracing values and ideas can transfer from close friends in a peer group to others in society and around the world. In addition, students must be able to trust and be trusted through open and honest communication. Topics such as racism, sexism, and other subjects that can be difficult for others to investigate must be understood and openly discussed in order to promote student growth. This idea of more in-depth sharing and conversation leads to the recognition of flaws and the appreciation of assets (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Vector five of Chickering’s series encompasses Establishing Identity. This vector is essentially a culmination of the prior four vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Within the fifth vector there are seven segments in which to consider. These subdivisions include:

- comfort with body and appearance;
- comfort with gender and sexual orientation;
- sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context;
- clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style;
- sense of self in response to feedback from valued others;
- self-acceptance and self-esteem;
- and personal stability and integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49).

It is important for students to develop a sense of who they are. Being able to establish identity includes being able to understand and solidify a sense of self (Reisser, 1995). Beyond discovering a sense of self, college students are concerned with how they look, the perception of others, and their place in peer groups. The establishment of identification draws from many facets of the first four vectors by managing emotions, connectedness, relationships, and becoming competent overall with critical thinking skills. Furthermore, establishing an identity
for a college student means to find their place within a culture, society, or within the religious spectrum (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

*Developing Purpose* is the sixth vector within the theoretical framework utilized for this study. For a student to develop purpose in what they do, it is imperative they first understand their goals. Developing purpose is an intentional process in which specific objectives are to be obtained while planning for the future. This same path must include prioritizing and making commitments in order to accomplish the desired goals (Reisser, 1995). Three tenets within the sixth vector for students to consider when seeking the development of purpose are to make vocational plans and aspirations, identify personal interests, and recognize interpersonal and family commitments.

For students to find purpose in what they do, or their vocation, it is first important for them to discover what they truly enjoy doing (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). When meaning and value are incorporated with personal interests, a sense of longevity and stability is added to an individual’s purpose. Further, a student can create purpose following their increased sense of self and identify next steps in relationships, education, or career development. Finally, the purpose developed by a college student must make compromises in the process that may end in clearer values and goals being acknowledged.

Vector seven, the final vector of Chickering’s student development theory, is *Developing Integrity*. Integrity is something that can loosely be defined as clarifying purpose while establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Integrity also requires great focus on personal values and the maintenance of them (Perry, 1970). Moreover, the ability to monitor and interpret others’ values and views is an important principle of vector seven (Chickering &
Reisser, 1993). The three primary aspects of integrity according to Chickering and Reisser (1993) are

humanizing values—shifting away from automatic application of uncompromising beliefs and using principled thinking in balancing one’s own self-interest with the interests of one’s fellow human beings, personalizing values consciously affirming core values and beliefs while respecting other points of view, and developing congruence-matching personal values with socially responsible behavior (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p.46).

A college student’s integrity includes the values formed through childhood and adolescence and the beliefs learned through socialization. Regardless of where the values have come from—school, church, media, parents, etc.—when students are in the process of development all values must be evaluated. Frequently new standards of integrity will be created and molded and activities will be congruent with values held. Being able to monitor values of others and self and maintain behaviors matching those values is essential.

A review of Chickering’s student development theory reinforced the importance of establishing implications for practice. College administrators familiar with Chickering’s seven vectors seek to create programming to promote competence in the identified areas. A well-versed administrator can utilize the vectors to establish goals of program offerings by applying concepts outlined in the description of each vector. Further application of the theory can be viewed along a continuum of energy exertion by students. The students who tend to be more actively engaged in seeking leadership opportunities, which specifically cater to the seven vectors, have a greater chance of developing holistically.

Developing a certain level of competence in all levels of Chickering’s student development theory provides for a better-rounded student leaving college and entering society.
When colleges hone in on educating students in this manner, they tend to be better prepared in many facets of life. By educating students socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually, students gain a broader perspective of themselves which leads to independence. Independence at college, as Chickering and Kytle (1999) explained it, comes more deeply through engagement in leadership activities that involve cultural awareness and interpersonal skills. These skills sharpen as students become more fully involved, which can happen at a more rapid rate when being away from home (Chickering & Kytle, 1999). With this said, the message about community college students being involved is clear: Become actively engaged in a leadership program to develop as an individual through a holistic approach.

**Student development.**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) additionally recognized that the learning environment has a significant impact on the attainment of each vector. They further outlined seven influences that affect a student’s development, including institutional objectives, institutional size, student-faculty relationship, curriculum, teaching, friendships and student communities, and student development programs (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). The latter influence, student development programs, was the focus of this study to which Chickering’s theory was applied. Within student development, Astin (1984) contributed to the literature by examining the impact of involvement. Astin (1984) defined involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy exerted (p. 297). It is necessary to note Astin (1984) suggested involvement in development programs requires energy and focus to attain the seven vectors within Chickering’s student development theory.

In the following section, the empirical data pertinent to this study will be presented in relation to the problem of practice. Content in the realm of leadership, leadership development,
engagement, and the community college population are offered to build a foundation for the study. Later in the project, the literature will be referenced in relation to this study’s findings in an effort to fill the existing gap which surrounds the understanding of community college students’ experiences with a leadership program.

Chapter II

Literature Review

There were many important constructs to investigate and define when seeking to understand community college students’ experiences from participation in a student leadership program. It was initially important to understand leadership theory and practice as part of an overall student leadership program as it relates to students’ experiences. Additionally, defining what a student leadership program is, why these programs have become popular as an intervention strategy, and the desired outcomes of such organized activities was vital to comprehend prior to the research study. The target demographic for this study, community college students as a population, was important to understand throughout the investigation. Finally, a discussion of the implications for student development and benefit of student engagement as a result of participation in a student leadership program was pertinent to this study.

In the last two decades colleges have begun offering more co-curricular leadership activities without a concrete understanding of the actual benefits to students (Astin & Antonio, 2004). Many of these programs have been implemented with the goal of developing student leaders. Astin and Antonio’s (2004) contention remains under substantiated consideration given the recent assessment communicated by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) that many college mission statements incorporate commitments to develop
students as civically responsible leaders (CAS, 2009). Changes in higher education today are swift; if colleges and universities are to keep up with the rapid pace they must gain control by meeting students’ needs (Miller, Carpenter, McCaffrey, & Thompson, 1980).

At many colleges and universities, student leadership programs have become a popular way to provide opportunities for students to gain skills. These same programs are slowly reaching community colleges. The primary concern for educators surrounding these programs is not necessarily in the implementation of such interventions but in the assessment of desired outcomes. According to Brungardt (1996) and Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhart (1999), student leadership programs, which consist of seminars, workshops, retreats, and other methods of developing students’ leadership skills, are often not assessed to gauge the impact of such activities. This is of extreme concern for educators as it is important for professionals to understand if these development activities are meeting the desired outcomes (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhart, 1999).

Leadership

There are as many definitions of leadership in the literature as there are leaders in history. De Pree (2004) argued that leadership is an art that can be learned over time through relationships. In his later works, Daft (2007) believed leadership was an influence leaders and followers shared through a relationship that anticipated outcomes and changes through shared purpose. Other scholars have attempted to encompass leadership into a single definition to no avail. Many of the definitions the researcher reviewed had some common terms or themes present. These include group interactions, relationships, decision-making, change, and vision. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) described leadership as being a social process, which was supported after the initial review. Leadership is essentially a relational process of working
toward a common goal with others to promote change (CAS, 2009). Similarly, this definition was found to be closely linked to Komives, Lucas, and McMahon’s (2007) definition of leadership that suggests leadership is a “relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (p. 11). For the purpose of this study, the definition offered by Komives et al. (2007) was employed.

A major component of leadership is establishing mature relationships. Relational leadership encourages trust and networking while working closely in the direction of common goals (Rost, 1993). The importance of leadership cannot be overlooked, as the sheer reason for relationships is collaboration, which is an essential component of student development (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Kouzes and Posner (2003) through their collaboration compiled several outcomes associated with relational leadership including integrity, credibility, and authenticity.

The characteristics of leaders are an additional point of contention among scholars. It is easier to list some of the attributes of a good leader and assume all leaders possess the same qualities (Matthews, 2004). Hensel (1991) argued that the main components of leadership include interaction with peer groups, the maintenance of superb verbal skills, the ability to adapt to new situations, and the awareness to be sympathetic. Similarly, Daft (2007) and Hellriegel and Slocum (2006) felt the characteristics of leaders included creating a vision, good communication, teamwork, trust, and an ability to develop strong leader-follower relationships. Yukl (1994) characterized traits of effective leaders as ambitious individuals who tend to be achievement-oriented, able to adapt to situations, cognizant of social environments, and willing to assume responsibility.

Leaders are not simply leaders because of a position or title. Leaders are also not merely born into the world as perfect influencers. There is an ongoing debate as to whether leaders are
born or made. Scholars in the field can only agree that if leaders are born they still need additional leadership training (Redwood, Goldwasser, & Street, 1999). Hellreigel, Jackson, and Slocum (2005) assumed that leadership activities develop people; this could only mean that leaders are made, not naturally born. Since it is well documented in the literature that leadership and leaders in general are difficult to define, it is possible for anyone to be a leader (Huckaby & Sperling, 1981). Leaders can be found in all walks of life throughout the private sector, public education, the political realm, or in the privacy of a family’s home (Hellriegel et al., 2005). The essential aspect of leadership to focus on—whatever realm is utilized—is relationships. Leaders cannot lead or display any form of influence over somebody who cannot form a connection to them (Simonton, 1994).

**Student leadership programs.**

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has outlined requirements for what student leadership programs must contain to be considered exemplary. The CAS Standards are comprised of fourteen specific areas beyond the expectation of impacting students’ learning and development (CAS, 2009). According to CAS standards, specific indicators for student leaders include intellectual growth, effective communication, enhanced self-esteem, realistic self-appraisal, clarified values, career choices, leadership development, healthy behavior, meaningful interpersonal relationships, independence, collaboration, social responsibility, satisfying and productive lifestyles, appreciating diversity, spiritual awareness, and a personal and educational goal (CAS, 2009).

Specific student leadership program domains and their related dimensions are narrowed to six primary components according to CAS professional standards including
• Knowledge acquisition, integration, construction, and application

  Dimensions: Understanding knowledge from a range of disciplines; connecting knowledge to other knowledge, ideas, and experiences; constructing knowledge; and relating knowledge to daily life

• Cognitive complexity

  Dimensions: Critical thinking; reflective thinking; effective reasoning; and creativity

• Intrapersonal development

  Dimensions: Realistic self-appraisal, self-understanding, and self-respect; identity development; commitment to ethics and integrity; and spiritual awareness

• Interpersonal competence

  Dimensions: Meaningful relationships; interdependence; collaboration; and effective leadership

• Humanitarianism and civic engagement

  Dimensions: Understanding and appreciation of cultural and human differences; social responsibility; global perspective; and sense of civic responsibility

• Practical competence

  Dimensions: Pursuing goals; communicating effectively; technical competence; managing personal affairs; managing career development; demonstrating professionalism; (CAS, 2009).

Student leadership programs have come not only as a response to the need for students to develop particular skills, but also to fill a co-curricular void (Eklund-Leen & Young, 1997). Eklund-Leen and Young (1997) went on to explain that major benefits can be produced by such
involvement in a leadership program, even if a student has significant time restrictions. All students have time constraints, but this issue is even more prevalent among community college students. When students do find the time to participate in a student leadership program, they tend to become more vested academically and socially in their education due to the simple fact they are participating in an organized leadership development program (Striffolino & Saunders, 1989). Effective student leadership programs can strengthen the academic element of higher education by making individuals aware of differences and by appreciating opposing values and views (Buckner & Williams, 1995). Involving these components, Magolda (1999) explained that comprehensive student leadership programs should be based on an active learning pedagogy where learning can be garnered through student learning experiences to create mutually constructed meaning.

Student leadership programs tend to offer a wide array of leadership activities to develop community college students’ abilities. For the purposes of this study, Al-Omari, Tineh, and Khasawneh’s (2008) definition of “leadership activities” as purposeful training and education in the realm of leadership development was utilized. Huckaby and Sperling (1981) went on to explain the importance of making student leadership programs available to all students. Bolman and Deal (1997) also discussed access by stressing the importance of making leadership programs available to all students, as sometimes elected leaders can attain a position as a matter of popularity. Boone and Taylor (2007) posited that it is the responsibility of the college community to embrace students and educate them by providing direction, guidance, and training on specific areas of leadership. Further, Karnes and Bean (1990) suggested it is possible to incorporate such leadership activities into various avenues of college life.
Most student leadership programs incorporate activities that build teamwork, problem-solving, communication, delegation, and decision-making skills (Chan, 2000). This can be done through volunteering, involvement in student organizations, service learning, or other various hands-on learning activities (Wielkiewicz, 2000). Smith, Smith, and Barnette (1991) added that administrators of such programs felt it was most important to add aspects of communication, cooperation, and leadership theory to student leadership programs. Though many topics are considered to be of great importance by scholars, most researchers agree that the greatest impact on a student’s leadership development comes from real-world application and transparency (Kitano & Tafoya, 1984; Wade & Putnam, 1995). High-level practical contexts are preferred for leadership training rather than inconsequential simulations, as students tend to take greater responsibility for their leadership (Huckaby & Sterling, 1981). Many early established student leadership programs taught leadership skills and expected students to adapt them to situations. Buckner and Williams (1995) expressed the importance of presenting exactly the opposite format by engaging students in real-life scenarios to move them out of their comfort zones with a reflection of the leadership skills learned following the activity. Hickman (1994) agreed with this theory and added that leadership concepts can be learned more easily after participating in an activity where it was recently demonstrated.

The benefits of participation in student leadership programs continue to surface. The positive effects tend to be comparable to those gleaned by students involved in other student organizations including an increase in self-confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to lead others (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkardt, 1999). Other skills that leadership programs offer students include interpersonal skills, problem solving, self-management, stress-management, and prioritization (Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994). Some students who participate in student
leadership programs report additional skills gained such as conflict resolution, public speaking, and an increase in positive group interactions (Outcalt, Faris, McMahon, Tahtakran, & Noll, 2001).

As members of a student leadership program, individuals become more marketable to employers. This is a response to the emphasis of a career development component which encourages life-long skills that are transferable to positions held after college (Williams & Winston, 1995). Additionally, Williams and Winston (1995) believed that participation in a student leadership program prepares students for the future regarding career planning and preparation. Some of these transferable skills include planning and developing programs for their prospective employer (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). Further, the education of students in areas of goal setting, achievement, and deadlines are all characteristics of a successful employee (Schuh & Laverty, 1983). Finally, Roberts and Ullom (1989) posited that given the variety of benefits of student leadership programs, organized training and development opportunities should be intertwined with the overall academic and co-curricular mission of higher education institutions.

Student leadership programs are assessed on the basis of meeting student needs, satisfying students, attaining student learning outcomes, and the overall evaluation of the program (CAS, 2009). It is further recommended that results of such evaluation be utilized to revise and improve the leadership program and services in the process of identifying the specific program focus. Additionally, regular assessment and evaluation of student leadership programs should be conducted to determine if goals are being attained. This must be done through quantitative and qualitative methods in order to conclude that outcomes are being fulfilled (CAS,
This recommendation is not taken lightly by the researcher and remains a basis for investigation.

**Community College Students**

Since leadership programs are essentially a new initiative at the community college level (Kodama, 2002), it is important to understand the particular student demographics prior to presenting the findings from interviews of participants in these programs. There are many differences between community college students and those students enrolled in traditional four-year colleges. Despite this fact, community colleges are held accountable for serving a diverse population of students and meeting their various needs. Almost half of all undergraduate students in the United States are enrolled in a public two-year college (Tinto, 2004). In accord, Striplin (2000) estimates that fifty percent of all students in the United States are enrolled in community colleges. Of these students, according to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), almost two thirds of community college students are part-time (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2009). In comparison with their four-year counterparts, students at two-year institutions tend to be nontraditional and are often socioeconomically and racially more diverse (Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, & Suppiger, 1994). Community college students also have the tendency to be less academically prepared than their four-year counterparts (Bragg, 2001).

It is on the basis of a diverse population that leadership programs and intentional workshops have been designed to increase student engagement to meet the needs of community college students. Cress et al. (2001) asserted that students involved in leadership activities benefit greatly from being involved. These benefits include peer interaction, problem-solving skills, and conversational awareness (Cress et al., 2001). Leadership activities have been further
defined by Al-Omari, et al. (2008) as purposeful training and education in the realm of leadership development. Community college students, as a population, are comprised of commuters, part- and full-time students, transfer students, and students returning to college after a break (Silverman et al., 2010). Consequently, this populace comes to campus with a variety of needs and even more obstacles vis-à-vis becoming immersed in the fabric of the institution. Colleges and universities have historically failed to recognize the frustrations, anxieties, and challenges of commuting to campus, being enrolled part-time, transferring from another institution, and returning to school after a leave of absence (Silverman et al., 2010). Institutions must provide options that help bridge the gap between the experiences of community college students and traditional student experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Community college students may differ as a demographic from four-year college enrollees, though many community colleges have begun to mirror larger colleges in their co-curricular student leadership program offerings. Bailey and Averianova (1998) discussed the transition from the original intent of community colleges as pure academic-offering institutions to the current state of student engagement activities outside of the classroom. In recent years, colleges have begun offering more co-curricular activities for students (Klesse & D’Onofrio, 1994). Klesse and D’Onofrio (1994) went on to discuss the importance of co-curricular activities and their place as part of the overall mission of the school by supporting the success of the student. Community colleges today serve both an academic and social function to better prepare students for transfer or job placement upon graduation (Bailey & Averianova, 1998).

Community colleges are no different from their four-year counterparts in respect to the importance placed on student engagement as a personal development strategy. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement suggests that community college students are a
multitasking group who balance their schoolwork, social life, careers, and families (CCSSE, 2009). The fact that community college students are a multitasking group is encouraging, though this behavior can be viewed as a hindrance. This demographic is happy to take on more responsibility but does not always follow through. It is for this reason that engagement is important and the recruitment of community college students into these commitments is so difficult (Marti, 2007). It is important to note, since community college students do not have as much time to engage in campus activities as their four-year peers, that there are consequences. As a result of this lack of involvement, these students pose the greatest risk of attrition if they are not involved in organized student activities (Kodama, 2002).

Analysis of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement by Marti (2007) recommended engaging community college students in the weeks preceding the start of college and maintaining this contact through leadership activities during the early weeks and months of a student’s college career. According to Marti (2007), data extracted from the CCSSE suggested an increase in retention, grades, number of terms enrolled, course completion rates, and graduation rates for those students engaged in co-curricular activities. This is good news for leadership program administrators. Although engagement activities have a significant impact on all students actively involved, students at high risk, such as community college students, glean more benefits from involvement (Greene, Marti, & McClennen, 2007).

**Student development.**

Student leadership programs often aim to increase student development (CAS, 2009). At the community college level, student development is particularly pertinent and directly correlates to positive outcomes such as skill development and transfer opportunities (Kodama, 2002). Many researchers have done extensive analyses that demonstrate the connection between
students’ involvement in campus activities with college personal satisfaction and achievement (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1987). In his research surrounding co-curricular involvement, Call (1974) believed there is merit to student involvement outside of the academic realm, and that there are several key factors within this involvement that contribute to the overall success of college students. In concurrence, Kuh (2001) posited that the schools that truly engage their students in meaningful activities tend to offer their students a better experience in comparison with peer institutions (p. 1). Additionally, Astin’s (1984) research supported the reasoning for student involvement through various theories commenting on the matter. Astin’s (1984) work focused on the energy exerted during engagement activities and posited that the more physical and psychological energy devoted to being on campus, studying, and taking part in student organizations, enhanced the level of student development.

Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement established that the quantity and quality of students’ interactions had a direct impact on persistence and satisfaction. Further, conclusions can be drawn reaching beyond involvement that leads to development of the student. Astin (1984) maintained that the amount of learning and personal development, which can be extracted from student involvement directly, related to the quality and quantity of the activities. Student leadership programs seek to harness Astin’s theory by providing opportunities for quality interactions through workshops and purposeful leadership activities (Al-Omari et al., 2008).

Perhaps most pertinent to this review is Astin’s later work. In Astin’s (1993) research he connected involvement in student organizations, particularly those students holding officer roles, with an increased level of public speaking, leadership proficiency, and interpersonal skills. In Astin’s (1996) literature, he found the three most significant areas in which involvement mattered to be involvement with other students, faculty, and academics. Astin went on to
explain that the greatest of all involvement activities was that of a peer group when affective and
cognitive development was considered. Kuh (2004) and Terenzini et al. (1996) supported
Astin’s findings and added that involvement with peer groups increased interpersonal
competence and cognitive complexity. Astin’s study does not bode well for community
colleges, however, as his research suggested that students who demonstrated higher leadership
abilities out of high school tended to enroll at private and large universities more frequently than
at community colleges.

Tinto’s (1987) student attrition model lends further legitimacy to the importance of
student engagement. Tinto’s model included a number of factors which can persuade a student
to either remain or depart from an institution. The primary component addressed in this review
is the impact social integration has on a student’s choice to persist or leave a college or
university. Tinto’s model took into consideration many components of a student’s background
and personal characteristics that appear to have a significant influence on student development
(Tinto, 1987). Tinto (1987) explained in order for students to be successful in college and
satisfied with their experience, they must have both academic and social achievement.

Tinto (1987) defined social integration as quality peer and faculty interaction and
commitments to school organizations. Once success in these areas has been attained, there
appears to be a direct correlation to persistence at an institution (Tinto, 1997). Tinto (1997)
warned that there are often unforeseen reasons for students to leave college, which cannot be
avoided. This is not a limit to his model, but a true reality. Not all students go to college to
graduate. According to the Community College System of New Hampshire (CCSNH) some
students have the goal of transferring to another institution or to simply take a few courses to
refine their skills (CCSNH, 2011). With this said, it is important to involve students on campus
to attain their desired level of satisfaction to avoid attrition. Not all community college students seek to graduate from the given institution. Some of these students fully intend only to spend one year at a community college prior to transferring or to obtain workforce training as part of their overall development (CCSNH, 2011).

**Student Engagement.**

Chickering and Gamson (1987) agreed with Astin’s and Tinto’s research that student interaction with faculty augments the student engagement experience. Student engagement has been defined commonly as the extent to which a student is involved in a variety of educationally purposeful activities (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Tinto, 1987). This engagement is also one of the most significant indicators of postsecondary student persistence, retention, and satisfaction (Braxton, 2008; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008; Kuh, 2004; Tinto, 1987). According to Kuh, Schuh Whitt, & Associates (1991), student engagement is often used interchangeably with student involvement. Participation in leadership activities, athletics, clubs and organizations, and volunteer and community service initiatives, are all programs that constitute involvement (Kuh et al., 1991). The association with faculty in these roles is primarily one of an advisor-student relationship. As such, when comparing definitions with Kuh et al. (1991), the two terms are quite similar. Kuh et al. (1991) asserted that student involvement is most commonly defined as the extent to which students participate in events and activities that are not incorporated into the academic curriculum per se, but do complement the educational mission of the institution (p. 7). Further research has demonstrated a direct correlation between student development and a student’s engagement of his learning (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
Additional studies have consistently concluded that students who maintain constant positive interaction with faculty have a better chance of increasing their personal development and satisfaction with the overall college experience (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) explained this exact process leads to persistence in college. In many schools, faculty members advise clubs and organizations on campus and coordinate or present workshops in leadership programs, enabling the connection with professors outside of class. This increased interaction only reinforces the importance of social and academic integration by students, which will enhance the chance of persistence (Tinto, 1997). It is fascinating to point out the term “involvement” was first highlighted by Astin (1993) and has since been adopted by most researchers as one of the critical aspects of student development despite disagreements over how to define involvement and measure it (Bean, 2005; Hagedorn, 2005). Milem and Berger (1997) emphasized this connection in their exploration of the relationship between Astin’s involvement theory and Tinto’s student departure theory.

The connection with peers and faculty becomes very important as these same professors are increasing their roles on campus by additionally coaching sports and even becoming house parents or residence directors (Hagedorn, 2005). This trend adds an increase in the quantity and quality of student contacts with these role models and mentors, who initially began as their instructors. There are several ways for college students to engage in campus activities outside of the classroom environment. These activities involve direct connections with peers and faculty or staff members. The Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) highlighted key areas relevant to this issue. The section that seems most pertinent to this review is the area comprised of measuring student involvement as assessed by the individual completing the survey. Engagement, involvement, and active participation in student activities and
leadership programs are used interchangeably in the scholarly literature (Pace & Kuh, 1998). As defined by Cress, et al. (2001), leadership activities can include a wide range of workshops, maintaining a student organization officer role, or other campus involvement. Having such a generic definition allows for student leadership to be developed in many realms of student life. The benefits of these leadership activities are well documented (Astin, 1993; Brungardt, 1996; Cress, et al., 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Students who participated in such activities tended to be more civically responsible, had better decision-making skills, and were dedicated to building the leadership skills of those around them (Cress, et al., 2001).

**Summation**

It is important to understand community college students’ experiences following participation in a student leadership program. After exploring the extensive literature in the area of student leadership, campus involvement, and student engagement, several conclusions can be drawn. One such element is the significant association between students being involved — especially with faculty members in diverse roles — and the effects on their personal leadership development. Kuh et al. (1991) found evidence that students benefit greatly by being involved in the educational process (p. 5). Additionally, the more actively engaged students are, meaning the more physical and psychological energy they exert while participating in these activities, the more likely they are to remain at a selected college or university (Astin, 1984). Another conclusion is that the amount of time spent with peers other than instructional time in the classroom correlates directly to satisfaction with the college experience.

An added connection that can be established regarding student leadership programs and the impact on college students is the level of commitment and positive outcomes. As stated in the literature by Eccles, Barber, Stone, and Hunt (2003), students maintain a higher grade point
average and attain fewer disciplinary concerns when actively engaged in co-curricular activities. This is of particular interest as much of the data in this area is related to traditional four-year college students, though community college students are statistically at a higher risk than other populations of dropping out of school (Tinto, 2004). These added benefits discovered in the process of the literature review are not necessarily linked to leadership development but are certainly an effect of involvement. It is also essential to state in this summary that research is consistent in providing the connection between student involvement and college satisfaction.

How student involvement and leadership activities affect community college students is yet to be analyzed or synthesized, which is the reasoning for the researcher’s problem of practice. This gap in the literature established the need for a study specifically focused on student leadership development of community college students.

There appears to be a direct correlation between students being satisfied with their college experience and the level of success they attain academically. This was prevalent in the literature and is derived from student engagement in co-curricular activities. According to Astin (1984), involved students achieve greater success than their unengaged peers. Hanks and Eckland (1976) and Light (1990) also found this involvement was directly related to success in the academic realm. Further, the engagement of students beyond the classroom walls emerges from the literature advanced by Cosgrove (1986) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) as enhancing student satisfaction.

Finally, Terenzini et al. (1996) concluded that it takes a combination of experiences in class and outside of the classroom, supportive of the overall educational mission of an institution over an extended period, to positively affect a student’s experience at college (p. 31). Thus, the literature suggests taking a holistic approach to student engagement through peer and faculty
involvement while exposing students to multiple opportunities for campus and community involvement. A student leadership program would meet all of these criteria according to the literature while offering additional benefits psychologically. The engagement level should be extensive and as Astin (1984) suggested, the involvement should require physical and psychological energy (p. 297).

**Recommendations**

The literature and its reported data thus recommend that students become more involved in campus activities. Increased involvement in college clubs, events, programs, and tutoring programs show a positive increase in the student’s perception of the college. Further research at this point is warranted to solidify the initial review. A lack of direct correlation in the research between a community college student’s participation in a student leadership program and the effect on their student leadership development exists. The current correlation, which is established, is related to peer and faculty contact. The majority of the research reviewed was several years old, which substantiated the reasoning for the study conducted.

When identifying the community college demographic, there is little empirical research available on the training of student leaders. There are even fewer studies that address the effects of leadership development in community college students (Bers & Smith, 1991). There has been some research done in the area of college student leadership and leadership development but the area is still in its infancy stages. Most of the leadership training and development literature focuses on business training models and primary school student development. Further research is recommended in order to coherently define leadership, articulate successful methods of training community college students to become leaders, and to further evaluate how community college students make sense of their leadership training. It is for this reason the researcher chose
to investigate community college students’ experiences following participation in a student leadership program.

After reviewing the literature, there is an abundance of support for further study with the community college student demographic and student leadership programs. There is a void in the scholarly literature to which this study seeks to contribute by gaining an understanding of community college students’ experiences with a student leadership program. It is for this reason the researcher aims to learn about the students’ perspectives through the study. In the next section, the details of the research design will be conveyed in great complexity.

The literature on student leadership programming is vast and vague, and even more so at the community college level. Nonetheless, researchers have concluded that quality leaders are paramount to the success of all organizations. The following section outlines the sequential procedure of this study by initially providing the research question. The research question is followed by a depiction of the methodology employed, which includes specific information about the site and participants, data collection strategies, and data analysis techniques. The final aspect of the research design provides reasoning for trustworthiness within the study.

Chapter III

Research Design

Research Question

The research question that directed this study was how do community college students perceive and describe their experiences with leadership training? Although only one research question was utilized for this study, the central question has many complex components which necessitate further exploration. Community college students, as demonstrated in the earlier review of literature, are a unique population and may have a different perspective than their four-
year peers to offer after an experience. It is for this reason the community college population was targeted and specified in this study.

Beyond the actual population identified in the study, one of the most critical aspects of the question comes in the form of the community college students’ rich descriptions shared with the researcher. As Moustakas (1994) explained, the word *describe* allows participants to create meaning of their experiences. It is via this description participants were asked to make meaning of leadership in general, and as it related to their development. It is during the description of participants’ experience that Chickering’s student development theory proved invaluable as a theoretical framework for this study. Since Chickering’s student development theory was originally developed to help define and understand college student development, the researcher had a proper lens through which to view the problem of practice (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The word *perceive* is subjective in nature and allowed participants to demonstrate that leadership training is viewed differently by different people (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107). A participant’s perception is their reality and is what allows them to make sense of their experience. The word *experience* in the research question allowed for open-ended responses primarily in the form of stories. Understanding that an experience is a difficult entity to explain, the researcher has enlisted Dilthey’s (1976) definition of an experience:

> Whatever presents itself as a unit in the flow of time because it has a unitary meaning, is the smallest unit which can be called an experience. Any more comprehensive unit which is made up of parts of a life, linked by a common meaning, is also called an experience, even when the parts are separated by interrupting events. (p. 210)

The primary research question served as the foundation for establishing the interview guide. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin’s (2009) recommendation to derive a “conversation with a purpose”
from the initial research question supported this notion (p. 56). Further, the primary research question guided a list of open-ended questions in an effort to channel participants’ stories and emphasize the importance of candor (Smith et al., 2009).

**Methodology**

The aforementioned research question was addressed utilizing a qualitative approach given the analytical nature of the study. According to Merriam (1998), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). By gaining a student’s perspective, the researcher gained better insight into the experience had throughout the student leadership program. As outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is distinguished from other forms of inquiry as:

. . . a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Stake (2010) posited that the understanding of a specific situation and activities is depicted for the reader through qualitative research. Creswell (2007) also reminded researchers that utilizing qualitative research is the primary means to learn about human behavior. The researcher was intimately interested in learning about community college students’ behaviors and the
descriptions and experiences from such participation in a leadership program. Finally, a qualitative approach for this study was warranted given the attention to interpretation, descriptions, characteristics and meaning sought (Creswell, 2007).

**Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.**

The type of practice-based research within qualitative methodology that best fit the research question in this study was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The study attempted to understand community college students’ experiences from participation in a student leadership program, which made the methodological approach appropriate. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is “committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). The sheer fact that IPA seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences is what made the methodology attractive to the researcher.

As a qualitative approach grounded in experiential and psychological research, IPA has three primary tenets. These three aspects include phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). According to Kockelmans (1967) the term *phenomenology* was first utilized in 1765 in philosophy (p. 24). Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience and what is happening in an individual’s lived world (p.11). Phenomenology has evolved and been enhanced by many researchers starting with Heidegger (1962) and later gaining traction from empiricists such as Husserl (1970) and Merleau-Ponty (1968). The advances that have brought phenomenology to its existing state concluded that to fully understand an experience, a person must be viewed while embedded and immersed in their world (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics as a theoretical underpinning within interpretative phenomenological analysis contributed a lens of interpretation. As part of the process of interpretation,
hermeneutics suggested that the researcher pay particular attention to relationships and seek to make meaning of experiences interpreted. The hermeneutic circle within the theory added additional clarity for the researcher as it provided a whole-part frame of reference. As Smith et al. (2009) posited, to understand a part of something, it must be seen in relation to the whole. The whole of an experience is also clearer when viewed in relation to the part (p. 28).

The final of the three philosophical components of IPA is idiography. Idiography earns its identity by being concerned with the particular (Smith et al., 2009). The particular can be broken down into two separate levels, which helped the researcher further understand participants’ experiences in the study. The first level is detail. Detail of the particular was important to this study as it added depth to the analysis. The second level of the particular is understanding particular experiences from particular people. This was of specific importance for the researcher as the basis of this study was directed at a unique population.

**Site and Participants.**

This study was conducted at a medium-sized community college in the northeastern portion of the United States. The research site was NHTI, Concord’s Community College (NHTI) which has residence halls, student organizations, athletics, and over sixty academic programs. At NHTI, the student population is nearly five thousand students, including day and evening enrollees, with the average student age being twenty-four years old. Approximately 95% of the student population at NHTI is comprised of Caucasians with the other 5% consisting of primarily African Americans, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans. The general study body is made up of 56% women and 44% men (NHTI, 2012).

At NHTI, there is a co curricular student leadership program housed within the Student Affairs Department. It is from this program participants were solicited for participation in the
researcher’s study. In true accordance with IPA research, and as suggested by Smith et al. (2009), purposeful sampling was employed when selecting participants for this research study. This was recommended primarily for the reason that certain participants are able to offer a research project deeper insight about their experience (p. 48). Further, as recommended by Smith et al. (2009), participants were selected in an opportunistic manner through the invitation of three student leadership program enrollees immediately following their involvement. Additional criteria for selecting study participants was based on academic eligibility for participation in the leadership program, involvement in a campus organization, and plans for returning to the program next semester. The ability to select such participants was done via opportunistic sampling as a direct result of the researcher’s role in the Student Affairs Department and accessibility to the students. It was in this role the researcher served as what Seidman (2006) coined an “informal gatekeeper” (p. 45). It is as a gatekeeper of these members of the student leadership program that the researcher had privileged access to study participants. The Student Leadership Team, the governing body of the leadership program, granted permission to access the contact information of the leadership program participants (please refer to appendix A regarding permission to access participants).

It was under this premise the researcher emailed all eligible participants in the leadership program to participate in the study. There were eleven participants who met the criteria for the study of the seventeen program members. Of the eleven students eligible, six students responded with interest. All six of the interested students were then asked about their availability for interviews and willingness to be audiotaped. The three students with the most flexibility in their schedules and who lived in the closest proximity to the researcher were chosen strictly for convenience purposes. The three students not selected for the study, but who did respond with
some level of interest, were thanked for their interest and told if they were needed additional communication would occur. It should be noted, however, that the three students selected for this study are typical of a leadership program in that they are involved in several leadership positions on campus. At the community college level, many student leaders who exhibit leadership potential are engaged in a variety of co curricular opportunities.

Since the researcher was going to conduct in-depth interviews utilizing an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, he adhered to Smith et al.’s (2009) suggestion of three to six participants. In adhering to this recommendation, only three students were selected to participate as the researcher is a novice and was advised to focus on three interviewees for data management purposes. Furthermore, the participants sought for this study were provided the information in the invitation letter that the data from their interviews will be used to enhance the program. In true accordance with Smith et al. (2009), the researcher sought a primarily homogenous group, as only NHTI students who have participated in the student leadership program were able to describe their experiences.

Johnson and Christensen (2004) recommend ten to fifteen participants for studies with in-depth interviews. However, Patton (2002) referenced the lack of rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry, stating that finding a “saturation” point is the goal in this type of design. Since three to six participants was the recommendation by Smith et al. (2009), the researcher was confident that saturation would occur and rich data be extracted from the study. To reach saturation, the researcher got to a point in the interviewing process where nothing new was being learned. While the interview sample was small in nature, it did still meet the minimum standards for a satisfactory number of interviews of three to five participants as recommended by Creswell (2007).
Data collection.

Data was collected during the summer of 2012. In agreement with qualitative research tradition (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2010), multiple data sources were collected. Data sources included in-depth interviews, follow-up conversations for member checking, the researcher’s diary, and available artifacts and documents from the participants’ experiences. As Smith et al. (2009) suggested, IPA seeks to attain a rich, detailed, first-person account of the experience. The goal was to answer the researcher’s question through these data sources.

In-depth interviews are the best way to accomplish this feat, and thus stories of participant accounts with leadership training were elicited in this manner. In-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted in an effort to learn about participants’ experiences in the form of a story. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and reflectively at great length (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews conducted in this manner were “conversations with a purpose” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). The in-depth interviews originally were organized via the three series approach. Siedman (2006) suggested using the three series interview approach and having a separate focus for each interview. The first interview was supposed to focus on the life history of the participant to qualify further communication through contextual understanding. The goal of the second interview was planned to attain the details of the participant’s experience. It was during the second interview the participant would have also been asked to reconstruct the details of their experience (Siedman, 2006). In the third and final interview, the researcher’s task would have been to request the participant to reflect and draw meaning from their experience.

In lieu of conducting three separate interviews for each participant as originally planned, the professionals from Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board suggested
combining the content from all three interviews into one interview. It was recommended to keep the interview between sixty and ninety minutes in length. The reasoning for this suggestion was due to the fact that college students do not have a lot of extra time to spare and they were not being compensated for their participation in the study. Ultimately, the researcher adhered to the recommendation by the Institutional Review Board as this modification significantly decreased the chance of a participant not completing the entirety of the interview series. The goal of seeking intellectual and emotional connections from the participants between their experience and other facets of their life was still obtained (Siedman, 2006). All of the questions from the three interviews were combined into one comprehensive list of questions to account for all three aspects of the original three series protocol.

Many of the aspects of interviewing according to (Siedman, 2006) were still strictly adhered to throughout the study. It was first important to schedule the interviews for a ninety-minute time period. This was done to avoid the normal one-hour increment as a standard unit of time and the two-hour extensive period of time which could create “clock watching” (Siedman, 2006). Siedman (2006) also suggested allowing the participants to select the interview space where they could be comfortable. The researcher utilized this advice by asking participants to choose the space for the interview as long as it was conducive to audiotaping. Aside from the time allotment and interview space of each interview, Siedman (2006) offered guidelines regarding rapport with participants, signaling, and a variety of interviewing techniques for the novice researcher. The researcher became well versed in the protocol recommended and gained additional insight from the literature.

Data analysis.
The researcher captured each of the participants’ descriptions of leadership training. The researcher analyzed and synthesized the information obtained from the interviews to find common and contrasting themes and patterns between each case. The data were coded and themed according to Sadana (2009), utilizing lumping techniques. From the organized in-depth interviews the researcher gained an understanding, which gave insight into community college students’ experiences with leadership training and their development.

When first seeking to analyze data it is imperative to establish an *Epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). The word *epoche* is a Greek word meaning the suspension of judgment. The researcher set aside any judgment or everyday understanding of experiences and remained completely open and objective to the new data set collected. The researcher’s three sources of data were analyzed while embracing the importance of this bracketing technique. The three data sources generated were handwritten notes in a diary, digital recordings from in-depth interviews, and participants’ journals from the leadership program.

To properly analyze the data sources utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis as a methodology, a seven-step approach was recommended (Smith et al., 2009). The seven steps of data analysis for an IPA study are reading and re-reading interviews, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the next case, looking for patterns across cases, and writing the analysis (pp. 82-107). The researcher adhered to these seven steps throughout the analysis process.

**Trustworthiness.**

Given the interdependent nature of the work conducted by the researcher and participants, indeed, both the researcher and the participants had a grave responsibility to strictly adhere to structure, processes, and the use of the *epoche* bracketing technique. In true
accordance with Creswell (2007), field notes were shared with interviewees in an effort to increase the trustworthiness of the study through member checking. After the initial interview data was transcribed, the researcher emailed the transcripts to the participants to check for accuracy of transcription.

To further increase the trustworthiness of the results, data comparison between document review and interviews were completed to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in an effort to further clarify findings by revisiting the original sources (Creswell, 2007). Finally, triangulation of data occurred among the interview data, the researcher’s diary, and additional information following member checking.

**Limitations.**

It is readily recognized by the researcher that the study was only conducted with community college students, and as such it may not generalize to other populations. Additionally, with a small sample size it is difficult to know if participation in leadership training was the only reason for the entirety of the experience. Supplementary limitations exist in the realm of researcher bias as the researcher is the primary organizer of the student leadership program. As a true stakeholder in the program, the researcher remained objective as it was the rich descriptions from participants that will further enhance the program for future members.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The participants in this study were not at risk and there were no experiments conducted. This study documented experiences that have already happened and sought to understand and interpret information. There were foreseeable benefits to participation in the study for students to reflect on their experiences and gain additional insight. This was just one of the reasons
students were eager to participate in the study as a volunteer. The volunteer selection process was clear, fair, and non-discriminatory. It should be noted that some of the students invited to participate in this study were existing student leaders and paid Federal Work Study students reporting directly to the researcher. This is important to establish due to the reporting structure and potential risk of evaluation concerns or participant embarrassment after sharing in-depth stories. It is for this reason, and for the sake of anonymity, that no names of participants were used and their identities were revealed to the focus group and in interview transcripts only. Following the submission of this doctoral thesis, recordings of the interviews were destroyed.

All data gathered from participants was collected with explicit permission from the students and in full compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines from Northeastern University and NHTI, Concord’s Community College. Since no experiment was conducted, there was no threat of harm to the participants of the study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyung, 2010).

**Conclusion**

The comprehensive research design sought to gain information from community college student participants following their experience with leadership training. It is from these students’ input that the researcher answered the question *how do community college students perceive and describe their experiences with leadership training?* The researcher’s questions gleaned responses following a qualitative methodological approach utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA was well suited for this study because it is “committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). A small number of students (three) were selected to be interviewed via purposeful sampling.
One student who met the criteria was utilized for a pilot interview to allow the researcher to practice technique and questions. The small number of interviewees does meet the recommended sample size for IPA and provided the researcher with more than enough quality data to attain saturation. Interviews were conducted using open-ended questions to solicit storytelling. Once the interviews had all been conducted they were transcribed and the data was reduced, coded, and interpreted for common themes. Once the data had been organized into a coherent format, samples of the rich accounts were provided in the following section of this study in an effort to share the participants’ experiences.

Utilizing Chickering’s student development theory as a theoretical lens, it is understood that this study has added to the previously existing gap in the literature surrounding community college students and their experiences with leadership training.

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this research project was to explore the lived experiences of community college students participating in a student leadership program to examine how they made sense of this experience. The participants in the study each provided rich, detailed accounts of their experiences with leadership training and the meaning derived from the involvement. The analysis of the collected data led to five themes among the participants. The themes explicated from the interviews were (1) sense of belonging and positive relationships, (2) increased self-confidence, (3) increased self-awareness and self-monitoring, (4) understanding of personal identity, and (5) willingness to take initiative. This chapter will present a discussion of these themes. A discussion of the participants’ characteristics will be presented first and will be followed by the analysis section in which each theme will be discussed.
Participant Characteristics

Three students, two male and one female, were selected to participate in this study. All three students were matriculated community college students who participated in a student leadership program, were academically eligible for participation in the leadership program, were involved in a campus organization, and planned to return to the program the following semester. Student participants were each interviewed one time for an average of sixty-five minutes.

Garnett was a twenty-nine year old student in his second year at the community college. This participant was an Information Technology major, Orientation Leader, work study student, and president of the Student Senate. Garnett lives at home with his father and brother when school is not in session, and serves as a Resident Assistant during the academic year. Garnett has been active through school and continues to maintain a role in the Army Reserves. Garnett has completed one full semester of leadership training as part of the overall leadership program.

Reid was a twenty-three year old student in his first year at the community college. This participant already earned a baccalaureate degree and is seeking acceptance into the Radiologic Technology program. Reid is currently matriculated in the General Studies program. This student was the treasurer of the Campus Activities Board, a work study student, and an Orientation Leader. Reid lives at home with his parents and younger brother. This student has completed one full semester of leadership training as part of the overall leadership program.

Sharon was a nineteen-year-old first year student. She was a full time student majoring in General Studies with the hope of eventually studying Occupational Therapy. This student was taking courses full time and working in retail part time, and maintained a work study position to supplement her income. Sharon lives with her father, stepmother, stepsister, and stepbrother,
while visiting with her mother and stepfather weekly. Sharon has completed one full semester of leadership training as part of the overall leadership program.

Further clarification of study participants’ characteristics is offered in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Leadership Training</th>
<th>Campus Involvement</th>
<th>Field of Study</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garnett</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>One year (eligible for return)</td>
<td>Student Senate Orientation Leader Campus Activities Board Resident Assistant</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Work Study Part Time IT support Army Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reid</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>One semester (eligible for return)</td>
<td>Phi Theta Kappa Orientation Leader Campus Activities Board</td>
<td>General Studies (Radiologic Technology)</td>
<td>Work Study Full/Part time at a Casino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>One semester (eligible for return)</td>
<td>Orientation Leader Campus Activities Board</td>
<td>General Studies (Occ. Therapy)</td>
<td>Work Study Part time in retail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis

The themes explicited from the interviews were (1) sense of belonging and positive relationships, (2) increased self-confidence, (3) increased self-awareness and self-monitoring, (4) understanding of personal identity, and (5) willingness to take initiative. Each theme was established through the use of participants’ comments during interviews and additions they made to the interview transcripts. The themes were also a compilation of several very similar statements made by each participant, which added to the consistency of the theming process.

The themes are presented in a specific order, as the emergence of the content was consistently divulged by participants sequentially. When students described their experiences it
was clear they were seeking to be part of something, meet other people, and create positive relationships. Once these relationships had been forged, each of the students reported their self-confidence increased as they were comfortable trying and practicing new skills. Throughout the process of practicing these skills, leadership program participants reported feeling more conscious of others’ perceptions and aware of their actions and interactions. The next sequence of responses from interviewees projected the understanding of personal identity. Students reported having a better sense of who they are once the previous themes had been established. Finally, the theme derived from the interviews which the researcher found to be a culmination of the leadership program and basis for more engagement is the willingness to take initiative. Student participants described a feeling of wanting to employ their new skills and meet others through new avenues with the aim of starting the cycle again.

Below are the derived themes in the sequence they were described to understand the phenomena of community college students’ experiences with a leadership program.

**Themes**

**Seeking a Sense of Belonging and Positive Relationships**

The first theme derived establishes the basis for student development. Members in the student leadership program seek a sense of belonging and positive relationships. This need to want to be part of something and the fulfillment of such a need is a primary reason students were attracted to the leadership program. This notion was reinforced by Sharon’s comments about meeting people during the student leadership program. Sharon described the environment of the leadership program to the researcher as a welcoming environment in which the facilitation of activities encouraged the forging of relationships.
I learned how to meet people, which I’m very shy when I first meet people and then once you meet me I’m outgoing, but the leadership program helped me be outgoing from the beginning, which helps out a lot because you need people. I don’t even know any other way to explain that. You just meet people.

Garnett likened his experience with the leadership program to that of a cohort group. Garnett went on to explain the leadership program as a consistent group which regularly meets to get to know each other on a deeper level. This deepening of relationships was more plausible given the consistency and supportive atmosphere. The comments from Garnett were genuine and pointed to the positive relationships as a foundation for life. The researcher heard repeatedly from participants how powerful they felt relationships are and how many feelings of trust and respect are built on relationships. Student leaders reminded the researcher through their experiences as a participant in the program that a relationship must be established for people to want to follow a leader.

The results of this study and analysis lead the researcher to delve into the prior relationships in participants’ pasts. Reid reflected back to a time when he was a part of something and the relationships that were present. During his childhood, Reid transitioned from going to a small school to enrolling at a much larger one. It was during this time he was seriously ill and received treatment for his disease. Since he was away from his new school so frequently for this treatment, it was extremely difficult for him to forge new relationships.

All three participants reported establishing positive, meaningful relationships. Reid summed up the student leadership program environment by saying “Yeah. I mean, I feel like I’m in a friends setting.” When Garnett described some of his past relationships, there was an obvious lack of positivity present. The emphasis on seeking a positive relationship was apparent
through the interviews and observations during this study. Garnett went on to explain about his prior relationships before the student leadership program. He stated he was not one of the more popular students growing up and spent time with a smaller crowd of “nerdy” friends. A change in housing locations initiated the development of new friends in his new neighborhood. These new peers were mischievous and negative. Befriending these recent peers who got into trouble and had the perception of being “gangsters” brought Garnett the feeling of not caring about school. Garnett also admitted he never really had any relationships that lasted more than a few years.

Garnett added an even more specific account which supports this study’s findings of the need for positive relationships and a sense of belonging. Throughout high school Garnett had a good friend named Bob but realized quickly he was not a good person. Bob lied and was not a good friend to Garnett, which created a lack of trust in the relationship. Without much self-confidence, Garnett remained Bob’s friend even understanding his pitfalls, as he wanted a companion. Reid had described a similar experience from his background with an apparent lack of close friends and a glaring need to establish new relationships. The shift from private to public school for Reid meant the group of friends he once had became distant. The students at his new school had already established cliques which made it difficult to forge new friendships.

This theme emerged throughout the course of this study whereas all three of the participants had prior relationship issues and particularly negative or unhappy experiences with peers. It was because of the positive relationships that materialized in the leadership program that students began to get more comfortable. As a result of participation in a leadership program, community college students created positive, meaningful relationships and felt part of something
important. It was after this foundation had been established that these community college
students reported additional benefits occurring as a participant in leadership training.

Sharon mentioned that following her involvement in the leadership program, she was
comfortable and more inclined to increase her engagement at school.

The more [leadership program] meetings I went to, more comfortable I got, and more I
realized that being involved helps you and so when second semester came and I was
involved in CAB [Campus Activities Board] also, it got me even more excited and now
knowing that I went through the leadership program, can go through it again, and can add
on more involvement in the school, it just excites me. I can’t wait.

Sharon discussed more about the conducive nature of the student leadership program
environment. Sharon summed up the atmosphere to be educational and positive, while allowing
students to gain skills at their own pace. She described the atmosphere as a place to learn about
and develop leadership skills in a challenge by choice environment. The process of learning,
practicing, and presenting allows students the opportunity to step outside of and increase their
comfort zone in a supportive climate.

Reid further expressed his view of the environment of the leadership program as being a
defining characteristic. The student leadership program provides a comfortable, not “forceful”
environment for students to meet their peers, get comfortable with them, and establish
meaningful relationships. The leadership program is a program that enhances a person’s ability
to interact with peers. Garnett described how this interaction occurred in the program through
the intentional time allotted for teambuilding in the early stages of each session. Garnett recalled
a session focusing on networking and developing an elevator speech. Following some initial
instruction and an opportunity to establish a personal elevator speech, there was a structured
period of speed networking with other student leaders. This proved to be an opportunity for
students to interact in a jovial manner and a chance for program administrators to offer feedback
and evaluation.

Reid recalled the opening of each leadership session almost identically and reflected in a
very similar way to create meaning for the early events. Reid described the icebreaker and
teambuilding activities as a way to get people “loose”. This comfort came in the form of games
and activities and with that allowed people to interact in an informal manner. At the end of each
of the activities the group is asked to reflect on the learning that has occurred and connect the
experience to their daily life. These icebreakers help students create meaningful interactions
with their peers. Sharon highlighted several aspects of the leadership program, not the least of
which supports the importance of making such connections.

The Student Leadership program, it was a great experience for me because I got to learn
resume writing and social networking, and I made a lot of good connections with the
people there. Everyone had a chance to meet somebody new.

In summation, community college students are seeking a sense of belonging and seek to
establish positive, meaningful relationships at college. This is not unlike their four-year
counterparts, though prior to being comfortable enough to practice new skills, in this case
leadership skills, forging relationships is a necessity. The creation of positive meaningful
relationships requires student participants of the leadership program to make connections at a
deep level. Initially this process is completed through simple name games, and advances to
activities which involve trust development, finding commonalities, and team challenge activities
which build a positive foundation. This process also creates an introductory connection as
students have engaged in a shared experience.
An Increase in Self-confidence

The second theme, an increase in self-confidence, can be encapsulated by Sharon. She explained she tends to be outgoing. That was not an issue for her. The primary concern is to become comfortable with her environment and the people with whom she surrounds herself. Once this comfort has been established, she is willing to try new challenges. Similarly, Garnett attributed the confidence he gained to the support and encouragement he received from peers and program administrators. Following the increased self-confidence, he discussed the building of leadership traits and abilities.

The descriptions given by this study’s participants about the process of gaining confidence in a comfortable environment concluded that the atmosphere leads to the ability to try a new skill. Within the leadership program new skills are taught and students are given the opportunity to practice them with their peers. This practicing also leads to an increase in self-confidence with their peers and the particular skill. This skill attainment is done with the support and encouragement of all members of the leadership program and the program administrators to create a truly supportive environment.

Gaining the confidence to practice leadership skills in front of others is not immediate; in fact participants described quite the opposite experience. Garnett put his experience into perspective for others attempting to gain a sense of self-confidence. There is a process and flow to navigate. Initially there is a sense of nervousness. The anxiety slowly dissipates as more time and effort is invested in getting to know each other and practicing leadership skills.

Although an increase in confidence does not occur immediately in the student leadership program, interviewees agreed they could see tangible gains from their participation in the program after the fifteen-week semester. Garnett explained the evolution he realized over the
course of the program as an increase in confidence and overall personal growth. He went on to explain how he could feel and see the difference in his daily life and continued to be encouraged by the development he witnessed. He highlighted more of his experience with an increase in self-confidence, which is particularly important to focus on given his significant role on campus. He explained leadership development as a process. Garnett admitted he had gained some confidence but still wanted to increase his assurance level and was much more sure of himself than before he started the leadership program.

Garnett observed that an extra benefit to attaining self-confidence is being in sound physical shape. Synonymous with gaining leadership skills, he has found a healthy lifestyle to increase his confidence levels as well. His confidence went beyond his emotional state to become a physical obsession. He adapted a new habit of increasing his self-confidence through maintaining a healthy diet and exercise. This continued habit has augmented the leadership training he has received to create a holistic confidence increase. Student leaders offering their accounts of confidence enhancement often include an element of health and nutrition as the leadership program has supplied information through components about healthy lifestyles of leaders.

Once students have the confidence to try new skills and practice them in a comfortable environment, they begin to understand their roles as student leaders and the importance of enhancing their leadership skills. Reid described the ability to try new techniques in a safe place as the catalyst for his development.

Probably the best thing about the student leadership program is just the experience of having it. The only way that you’re going to get good at something is to practice it and just having that ability to try these new things and to step into a leader role and practice
being in a leader role through the student leadership program. Just having that experience of doing it is just going to be an amazing help. I’d say that we work on a variety of skills and merge them together to make you a better leader, better person within a group. That leadership’s everywhere.

Once students have gained confidence and begin to understand that through the practice and learning of leadership education they can be leaders, they can begin to reflect on times when they had a lack of confidence. Sharon justified a previous lack of leadership knowledge by attributing her naivety to her age. She described her recent accounts with leadership training in the leadership program as a chance to evolve and be more independent. Growing up, decisions were always made for her and she did not pay as much attention to leadership qualities around her. As she progressed through the program, she recounted being more in tune with what it takes to be a leader. Sharon now feels she has the ability to step into a leadership role and succeed in guiding others toward a common goal.

As Sharon suggested, and other participants echoed, following participation in the leadership program they felt more confident in leading others. She expressed her feelings through a rich account in her interview by explaining how she learned important skills through the leadership program which have prepared her for a leadership role. She went on to say that she is “100% comfortable in being able to be a leader and guiding people” in many aspects of life, including student organizations.

Sharon shared some of her volunteer experience as a case in point toward supporting the need for leaders and reasons for leaders to gain self-confidence. She summarized the example of volunteering to perform community service. In the past she felt it was necessary to follow a group to complete simple tasks such as picking up trash on the side of the road as part of an
Adopt-a-Highway project. Now, Sharon feels as though she could be the facilitator to coordinate a group to participate in such a project or even have the comfort level to go out and partake in the project on her own. This response from her supported the notion of an increase in self-confidence and an expanded comfort zone that allows an individual to initiate rather than follow. Sharon offered a metaphor which provides an adequate summary of the increase in self-confidence resulting from participation in the leadership program.

I just think this program was really helpful for me because, like, I keep saying this but I’d like to stress it because it amazes me how before I started the leadership program I said I was a leader. I had bits and pieces…now I feel like I have it all.

The theme of increased self-confidence resulting from participation in a community college student leadership program had just as much to do with being comfortable and having consistent peers as it did with leadership training. Students reported increasing their comfort zone and the willingness to be the lead on a project where they may previously only have felt comfortable being engaged as a follower. Additionally, students who reported an increase in self-confidence attributed the enhanced feeling to the practicing of leadership skills in a comfortable environment with supportive peers and program administrators. Based on this study, several environmental factors appear to be important to the success of students gaining an increase in self-confidence. The contributing factors are maintaining a supportive environment, having consistent peers to practice leadership skills with, and engaging in meaningful relationships as part of an overall student leadership program.

An Increase in Self-awareness and Self-monitoring

Following an increased sense of self-confidence, participants reported becoming more aware of themselves, their interactions, and others’ perceptions. Additionally, participants in this
study explained the understanding of expectations of them as student leaders following participation in the leadership program. Garnett explained a specific activity as part of the leadership program which encouraged him to learn about himself on a deeper level. He summarized an activity in which leadership program participants were handed a sheet of paper and were asked to write a brief description of themselves with goals they sought to accomplish. Many students did not know what to write, but the activity made students think critically about their future aspirations.

Garnett, through this activity and others, reflected on his current state and comfort with certain activities in his leadership role on campus. He went on to explain that he has noticed his speaking abilities had improved. This was noticeable through such speaking engagements as giving class presentations, introducing himself at orientation, and speaking at student organization meetings. This evident increase in the ability to speak well in front of audiences is a common feeling among student leadership program participants. Interviewees attributed their awareness of an increased ability to speak in front of others to the practice they had with communication skills as part of the leadership program. Garnett went on to describe the importance of gaining such skills and their transferability to other aspects of his life. He gave a heart-felt response about the skills he has gained as part of the leadership program being useful in all aspects of life, particularly after graduation and in later life.

This same type of reflection was utilized to become aware of Garnett’s role throughout campus and through his college commitments. He demonstrated a deeper level of awareness as he admitted how overcommitted he was on campus given his many roles and obligations. He went on to explain that many people have high expectations of him in his leadership roles and there is a perception that he will eventually let somebody down. This was the first time he
expressed concern for negative perceptions, though the way he described the insight, he was using it as a way to motivate himself to do well. The significance of understanding perceptions and knowing how to handle them as a student leader is very important. This aspect was communicated by all of the study participants and demonstrated via their new knowledge.

Beyond his own perceptions, Garnett has learned to assess others’ perceptions of his behavior through what he learned in the leadership program as “social etiquette”.

One thing that the student leadership has made me…it’s made me more aware of my interactions with people. Having all these relationships with people that you meet and throughout college, it’s almost like a game of social chess. You’ve got to learn how to play people. Not play people as in like a negative sense, but you’ve got to know how to deal with people. And being in that student leadership program you get to see all different types of people and ways to handle different things. That’s something that not a lot of people get to experience or get to deal with.

This realization was the case in this particular study with community college students. Reid offered an interesting perspective about self-awareness and self-monitoring from the standpoint of general advice gained from the leadership program. He explained the importance of being mindful of what an individual is doing and how he is being perceived. This belief came as a result of learning about role modeling and being a student leader on campus. People are always looking up to campus leaders. Whether they are in the residence halls, in the student center, or on the playing surface, somebody is always watching. The leadership training as part of the leadership program educates student leaders about being leaders twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Being a leader is not something that can be turned on or off. It is apparent
participants understood this message as part of their training, given their rich accounts of the importance of assuming that their actions are always observed.

Reid likened the perception and awareness aspect of leadership to his position working at a casino during the summer. The old adage of having a “poker face” is important as everyone is constantly monitoring how a leader is acting and reacting. It is important for leaders to demonstrate charisma without showing frustration or negativity when followers are looking for inspiration. Participants demonstrated their understanding of self-monitoring as people constantly look to leaders to gauge their response to a situation. It is up to leaders to set the tone and help facilitate a group’s efforts toward a common goal. People look to leaders to read their emotions, much like somebody playing blackjack at a poker table will look to a dealer’s face to be tipped off one way or another about their next move. The researcher felt this metaphor was a very good parallel to describe the importance of looking to others’ emotions to understand a situation. This parallel drawn by a participant demonstrated his understanding of the concept.

Garnett offered some suggestions following his experience with leadership training. He went on to analyze social etiquette and perceptions of others in his interview excerpt. Garnett stated in short that it is impossible to make everyone happy, though as a leader it is critical to understand one’s surroundings. This message that participants of the leadership program learned was explained as part of an educational component about the importance of knowing the politics of an organization. It is important to know the proverbial players and just as vital to know there is proper etiquette to handle all situations. It was at this point in the interviews student participants reminded the researcher that perception is reality. It is important for others to perceive leaders in a positive light as leaders represent entire organizations and even populations in some instances.
Sharon may have said it best in summarizing the role of a student leader, or leader in general. It was at this point the researcher felt participants truly understood the role and responsibility they maintain on campus.

I don’t think leadership is something that can come and go whenever it wants and in my life it wasn’t all there. I mean, there are bits and pieces that will shine through more than others, but a true leader needs to be a true leader all the time, not just when you feel like it, and that’s where I am now is I am a leader 24 hours a day, seven days a week, not just at my shining moments.

The theme of self-awareness and self-monitoring derived from this study is yet another aspect students gained from participation in the community college student leadership program. The importance of perceptions and role modeling, along with the value of integrity, meets an anticipated outcome of the program. Beyond meeting the desired outcomes of the program, student leaders provided detailed accounts of their lessons learned through the deliberative dialogue with peers and program facilitators during leadership sessions. It was clear student participants took away the importance of monitoring their actions in the many different situations they encounter and understanding the bureaucracy which is often present.

**A Further Understanding of Personal Identity**

Students in the leadership program reported learning about themselves, not just as leaders, but as individuals. Garnett explained this concept further and offered one of the activities he participated in as part of the leadership program which helped him gain a better insight about his personal identity. Student leaders were asked to prepare a one-minute elevator speech to converse with a partner in a round robin speed-networking exercise. In the process of creating the speech students mentioned how much they had to think critically about who they are
as a person and what makes them unique as individuals. This component of the leadership program further required student leaders to learn to sell themselves using their positive attributes. Generating the speech meant students not only had to think about themselves, but also talk about themselves. Participants felt the speech exercise was one of the most difficult, yet educational exercises in which they were involved. All three interviewees stated that as a result of participation in the leadership program their thinking has changed regarding the way they act and the way they view themselves.

Sharon recalled one of the specific modules she participated in as part of the leadership program which contributed to her understanding of her personal identity. The session, which allowed these community college student leaders to perform a personal assessment by utilizing the True Colors personality evaluation tool, was perceived as a revelation for the participants. Student leaders reported not only understanding more about who they are as individuals, but also about how and why they interact with certain types of other people in explicit ways. This assessment further allowed student leaders to understand the importance of having productive organizations with diverse personalities in an effort to see all points of view. The assessment further allowed students to understand who they are, why others act the way they do, and provide students with an appreciation for all types of personalities.

Reid remembered a similar activity to True Colors — StrengthsQuest — within the leadership program which helped students learn about personal identity, and offered his account. The understanding of self is imperative as a student leader. It is difficult to help others if you do not first know who you are. Further, student leaders offered that when they are more at peace with knowing who they are as a person, it is much more feasible to portray goals and aspirations about who you want to be in the future. Interviewees reminded the researcher that they had
learned as part of the leadership program about the importance of goal setting and maintaining a clear vision as being attributes of successful leaders. Goal setting was a point of emphasis for all participants in this study, which helped the researcher to mold the theme of personal identity development.

Sharon referenced the same activity as leading to her personal development and a means for increasing her understanding of self. She recounted many of the same comments summarized by Garnett and Reid, but added the personality assessments help student leaders come to a realization never seen before. Many student leaders had not had the opportunity to complete a personality evaluation of this nature and felt this was a turning point understanding who they are as individuals, leaders, and group members. This understanding is critical to success in the present day and in the future.

Perhaps most importantly for community college students, learning about who they are helped them to understand some of their goals and direction in life. Sharon offered her account of the leadership program as it related to goal-setting and forward thinking.

It’s more techniques on how to become a good leader and how to become a better leader, which I like a lot. I don’t get good grades but the leadership program helped me figure out that it’s an important part for what I want to do and for who I want to become.

Community college students learn about themselves in the leadership program. Gaining a personal identity is necessary prior to being able to be a role model or lead others. This has been portrayed very consistently through all of the interviews. Student leaders felt learning about themselves at first made them very nervous, but after establishing a foundation through the first three themes offered in this IPA study, they were more open to the idea. After students completed the assessment and began to share results they immediately began to gain a better
sense of who they are. Once meaning was given to the individual results as part of the personality assessment activities, many of the students felt there was finally a reasonable explanation for the way people interacted. Understanding these facts as a student leader gave participants a sense of empowerment.

**An Increase in Students’ Willingness to take Initiative and Seek Opportunities**

The final theme stemming from this research study was the response from student participants that they feel more equipped and prepared to take on new initiatives following the leadership program. It is apparent two findings have emerged within these students. The first outcome is that students are ready to apply their new skills. It is clear the interviewees were not always motivated to accept new challenges, meet new people, or take on responsibility. Garnett provided a historical perspective of his academic progress and co-curricular involvement prior to the leadership program. He reported always doing enough just to get by in life prior to his participation in the leadership program. He went on to describe the aspects of his life where he did the bare minimum to maintain the status quo including his previous job, coursework in high school, and recent involvement in student organizations. He expressed his content with only doing enough not to fail at something. This feeling was later explained by Garnett as a fear of failure and utter lack of self-confidence. Since the theme of self-confidence has already been established as part of participation in the student leadership program, this outcome would suggest that there are new opportunities for success.

Sharon discussed the emphasis placed on academics within the leadership program and summarized much of what all interviewees mentioned during the process. She went on to explain that “self-confidence comes from all aspects of life and must be inserted in these areas equally”. Getting good grades as student leaders is never going to be easy, but the persistence
applied will help to show others that priorities have been maintained. Participants in this study reported having more focus on their academics and other areas of life following the discussion about setting a goal and working in incremental steps to achieve the goals. This dedication demonstrates one of the most important qualities of a leader to others. Role models do what they say they are going to do.

When Garnett was asked about the difference in behavior and attitude following participation in the leadership program, his response told the story. He noticed a difference with his role in Student Senate. He noticed he was better equipped to run meetings each week and accomplish the established projects and programs on the agenda. Garnett also noticed, simultaneously, that Student Senate members supported him by agreeing to help when called upon and volunteered when he initiated a new plan. He went on to tie the perceptions of others, his own self-awareness, and initiative together in a response spoken like a true leader. Whether in a group of friends, at work, or in the classroom, he made it clear he wanted others to view him as somebody that can get tasks accomplished. Being seen as a persistent and capable individual has become important to him and he attributes this feeling to the experiences he had in the student leadership program.

Similarly, in a group, Sharon is willing to take initiative when it comes to decision-making and critical thinking. She shared her experience with a group of friends trying to decide a direction to take in a social situation. She served as the facilitator by offering ideas, adding to others’ ideas, and making sure everyone was heard. She mentioned how she felt better when she sensed that the group all had a say in the plan, though she admitted she guided the conversation. This form of initiative was consistent across all three participants. They were all willing to facilitate their peers coming to a decision and were not concerned about who got the credit for
coming to the conclusion. Further, each of the three student leaders was happy to serve as a group’s spokesperson if a decision needed to be communicated to outside constituents.

Sharon described how the leadership program has helped her to open up at work and helped others feel more comfortable immediately. She offered an example of an increase in her willingness to reach out to individuals following participation in the student leadership program while in her sales representative role at Old Navy. Sharon went on to describe how she would be the first person to walk up to somebody to introduce herself and see if she could help them. She felt it was her role to initiate conversation and make others, employees or customers, comfortable as soon as possible.

Sharon attributed her willingness to take initiative and become more engaged as a student leader to her experiences in the leadership program. She explained that the more sessions of the leadership program she attended, the more compelled she felt to become more involved on campus. This feeling stemmed from the energy, support, and positive feedback she received from her peers and program administrators about her performance in the program. The positive and conducive learning environment, coupled with the ability for participants to practice leadership skills, left student leaders wanting more opportunities to develop. It was at this point the researcher began to hear consistent messages that this particular community college student leadership program provided a space for student leaders to seek more responsibility on campus and beyond.

Not to be lost in the willingness to take initiative is the ability to fulfill commitments. As part of the student leadership program, follow-through is heavily emphasized and will lead to others’ perceptions of leaders being positive or negative. Reid explained his perspective of maintaining a commitment as “being where you say you are going to be when you say you are
going to be there.” He further added that preparation for such commitments includes researching pertinent information prior to anticipated discussions.

After all five themes, or stages of development, have been attained in the community college student leadership program, it is apparent participants seek a similar experience. Students look for more involvement and ways to exercise their gained skills and newly found confidence. One of the opportunities to do this is to invite program alumni back to speak, facilitate, and present in future leadership programs. When interviewees were asked if they would recommend participating in the student leadership program to others the responses spoke for themselves.

Garnett: Oh, absolutely. Do it in a heartbeat. It’s something that not a lot of people have an opportunity to do. And so to not take advantage of it is just a waste. It’s helped me so much. It’s been an incredible help. And just seeing how much it can change you as a person, I would recommend it to anybody. It would be stupid not to do it.

Reid: I want to be the leader, so the leadership program helped me kind of address that more instead of just telling, I would tell people, “Yeah, I’m a leader,” but after taking the leadership program I learned more skills to become a leader.

Sharon: I don’t think anybody is ever perfect no matter how much practice you get, but the practice definitely does help so if somebody who wanted to become a leader but had no leadership skills and they wanted to take the leadership program, I think it would help them. They wouldn’t become an expert leader but they would be that much closer to being a leader. I think anybody can benefit from this program.

Reid summarized the findings of this study quite succinctly when he offered his final comments about his participation in the leadership program. He mentioned it was something that
was fun and educational at the same time. He went on to explain that the program allows student leaders to learn about themselves, others, and the interactions that take place. In addition to being a place to meet others and get comfortable practicing important leadership skills, learning about oneself is a skill that can be used for the rest of one’s life. All three participants offered their understanding of the leadership program as a series of workshop sessions aimed to help students understand how the world views them, how they view themselves, and how the process can be molded.

Over the course of her interview, Sharon shared a story about her childhood that left the researcher examining her life history and her experience with the leadership program. This story about playing with her siblings is telling of the before-and-after effect of her participation in the community college student leadership program.

When I went to my dad’s house it was actually kind of sad because being the youngest, my siblings liked to pick on me, and I remember we used to have a trampoline and whenever I would get on the trampoline, they would stop playing and they would just look underneath and tell me they were watching the grass grow so I wouldn’t want to be a part of it…I just think this program was really helpful for me because, like, I keep saying this but I’d like to stress it because it amazes me how before I started the leadership program I said I was a leader. I had bits and pieces of me being a leader but now instead of watching the grass grow with my siblings, I would just jump, like now I am free to jump.

Students’ willingness to take initiative and become more involved in campus life following participation in the leadership program is not completely surprising, but it is intriguing. It appears students enjoy the gaining of leadership skills following their increased
self-confidence and comfort so much they seek to practice these skills. Further, students appear to want to establish more meaningful relationships and attain new levels of confidence. The data from these themes suggest a cyclical nature to the leadership development process for community college students. Additional clarification about theme derivation and the connection to the selected theoretical framework is presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Theme Derivation and Connection to Theoretical Framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Supporting comments</th>
<th>Associated Vector (Chickering)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging and positive relationships</td>
<td>“Getting involved”, “smaller and personal”, “small and intimate”, “safe and comfortable atmosphere”, “friendly and fun environment”, “lots of interaction”, “feel part of something”, “built meaningful relationships”, “felt connected”.</td>
<td>Developing Purpose (Vector 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
<td>“Felt looser and relaxed”, “got over my nervousness”, “felt comfortable practicing leadership skills”, “made me feel I could be a leader”, “a forum to learn with friends”, “it was ok to fail”, “fun to try new things”, “the program made me more outgoing”.</td>
<td>Managing Emotions (Vector 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-awareness and self-monitoring</td>
<td>“Understand others’ perceptions”, “learn to look in the mirror”, “see how people view you”, “be mindful of what you are doing”, “recognize how people look at you”, “ask for and receive feedback”.</td>
<td>Developing Integrity (Vector 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of personal identity</td>
<td>“Learned who I am”, “began to see beyond my perceived limitations”, “makes you think about who you are as a person”, “allowed me to discover who I am”, “I became less nervous and changed me as a person”.</td>
<td>Establishing Identity (Vector 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to take initiative</td>
<td>“Feel empowered to get what I want out of school, and life in general”, “able to put more effort into decision making”, “I feel I can motivate others through my actions”, “using skills to harness my emotions will make me a better leader”, “I feel like I could handle almost any situation”, “I think about things in a different, but proactive way”.</td>
<td>Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence (Vector 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summation

It has become clear to the researcher following this study of community college students’ experiences with a leadership program that their development and ensuing attraction to more engagement activities occurs in a cyclical nature. The initial theme identified the importance of these students getting to know their peers and their environment, and establish positive meaningful relationships with the individuals in which they will be working. Once these relationships have been established and continue to be maintained, student leaders begin to increase their self-confidence through the practicing of leadership skills and the monitoring of advances in their abilities.

Once the process of leadership skill practicing has commenced, students begin to learn more about themselves and others through reflection and feedback forums that analyze the proficiency level of their skill development. Following the continued positive and corrective evaluation conversations in such a comfortable setting, students begin to learn about who they are as individuals and leaders. Once students do learn about their identity in a more concrete manner, they are more comfortable seeking new opportunities to practice and develop their skills. The willingness to take initiative is not confined to academic or student organizations, as participants related their new comfort level with working with others to examples at work or in social settings. In short, once students have progressed through the community college student leadership program, they are left wanting more chances to develop as individuals and leaders.

Chapter four has presented the findings of the study including themes, excerpts from interviews, and alignment with the empirical research of Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen, (2005) and the selected theoretical framework of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) student development theory. All of the data was checked for trustworthiness through a
follow up conversation with each participant to review the transcripts. Each theme has presented an important cluster of information, which was present across all three participants’ interviews. These themes have formulated the content to be discussed in the following section.

Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand community college students’ experiences with a student leadership program. The research question, which provided a foundation for this study, was as follows: how do community college students perceive and describe their experiences with leadership training? The five themes generated from the data analysis phase of this study were as follows: (1) sense of belonging and positive relationships, (2) increased self-confidence, (3) increased self-awareness and self-monitoring, (4) understanding of personal identity, and (5) willingness to take initiative. These results have established meaning in relation to the research question in many regards. These themes have also contributed to the significant void in available empirical data surrounding leadership programs at the community college level. The findings of this study have both reaffirmed some studies and theories in addition to offering new data to the minimal base of knowledge existing regarding this demographic.

In utilizing Chickering’s student development theory and his ensuing seven vectors to guide the analysis, the five themes from this study resemble aspects of the vectors. Further, the seven vectors helped to shape and develop the themes from this study given their contributions to the literature in student development. Student development theory provided a foundation for sensemaking by offering empirical guidelines for the researcher to derive the themes. Each vector played an important role in offering plausible outcomes as leadership development
occurred. Student development theory provided a critical lens through which to view participants’ responses and understand how they made sense of their experiences.

**Themes**

**Community College Students Seek a Sense of Belonging via Positive Relationships**

Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) student development theory offered a means to interpret the sense of belonging sought by community college students. Within Chickering’s seven vectors, there is a great emphasis placed on the importance of collaboration and peer interaction to enhance student development. The researcher’s findings confirmed the usefulness of student development theory as a framework and substantiated the paralleled findings.

Tinto (1987) identified social integration as institutional commitments, peer-group interactions, and faculty contact. Success in these areas leads to a re-evaluation of commitments in either the desire to persist or the decision to leave college. The engagement level should be extensive, and as Astin (1984) stated, require “physical and psychological energy” (p. 297). The current study supports Astin (1984) and Tinto’s (1987) findings in two ways. The initial theme of seeking positive relationships within this study supports the desire to connect with peers outside of the classroom. Secondly, the community college students interviewed described the energy they exerted to participate in the leadership program. The program was described as a commitment that was made and was going to be kept.

According to Pielstick (1998), “building relationships reflects the interactive, mutual, and shared nature of transforming leader behaviors” (p. 23). Pielstick (1998) added that “a web of high-quality relationships makes it possible to communicate, to affect the shared vision, and to shape the culture that supports the vision” (p. 23). The current study supports Pielstick’s (1998) findings to some extent but offers a variation for community college students. The reciprocal
nature of the relationships established can be transferred to understanding community college students from this study. The communication aspect via high-quality relationships may or may not be present. The emphasis of communication as a construct within the program was threaded through many of the interviewees’ comments but not particularly in the area of relational foundations. The researcher’s interpretation from this study was that communication served primarily as the foundation to establish the relationships and not the reverse.

Membership in a community college student leadership program is characterized as an “institutional commitment” as defined by Tinto (1987) and would also meet Komives et al.’s (2005) definition of “meaningful involvement”. Komives et al. (2005) found that meaningful involvement is the training ground where leadership identity is developed (p. 598). In aligning this theme with the researcher’s theoretical framework, Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) third vector appropriately relates to the findings as it includes the ability to establish relationships with peers. New relationships are forged with the ideals of reciprocity and equality at the foundation. Other consideration is given to the community, society as a whole, and the greater good of the world. Within the third vector, interdependence is defined as respecting the autonomy of others while constantly seeking ways to collaborate with an increasing group of peers (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Further support is given to the importance of establishing positive relationships as Reisser (1995) recognized relationships provide powerful learning experiences for students — male and female — about feelings, communication, self-esteem, and values. One of the primary functions of colleges and universities is to promote acceptance of differences, which can be done through relationship and acceptance building (Reisser, 1995). At the college at which this IPA study was conducted, the emphasis on relationships within the leadership program was extensive.
Furthermore, the acceptance of all people, regardless of differences, is what supported the development of meaningful relationships. Since Van Linden and Fertman (1998) described leadership as being a social process, participants’ peers play a large role in leadership development. Leaders cannot lead or display any form of influence over somebody who cannot form a connection to them (Simonton, 1994).

Similarly, the theme of students seeking a sense of belonging and positive relationships is comparable to their four-year counterparts in many respects. In a study conducted by Komives et al. (2005), the researchers found that leadership identity can be established through meaningful involvement. Although the researcher agrees with this finding, this study suggests that relationships must be established to create a sense of belonging prior to the learning of leadership skills and ensuing leadership identity. Komives, et al. (2005) spent a great deal of time and effort in their studies about relational leadership. These researchers suggested leadership is a collaborative process in which positive change is the primary aim. This study confirms Komives et al.’s (2005) initial research in the area and supplements the findings by adding the importance of relationships to community college students. Community college students may need relationships and collaborations prior to being able to move toward positive change, unlike the research about four-year students who can attain the two simultaneously. A major component of leadership is establishing mature relationships. Relational leadership encourages trust and networking while working closely in the direction of common goals (Rost, 1993).

Finally, as a result of participation in a leadership program, community college students created positive, meaningful relationships and exhibited a sense of belonging. It was after this foundation had been established that community college students reported additional benefits
occurring as a participant in the leadership program. This study supports prior findings from studies represented in the literature and adds to the small gap in the literature regarding community college students.

This finding suggests that community college students must first be comfortable in their environment before they are able to practice new leadership skills. This particular discovery from this study also suggests that once students feel as though they are part of a cohesive group they are more likely to stay involved and participate in the core curriculum, in this case, leadership training. The positive relationship established through the leadership program is substantial as students reported wanting to create more relationships by being involved in more aspects of campus life.

As suggested from these findings and supported in recent literature, a student leadership program can serve as a catalyst for many aspects of a student’s life. Students tend to be more vested academically and socially in their education due to their participation in an organized leadership development program (Strifflino & Saunders, 1989). Student leadership programs have come not only as a response to the need for students to develop particular skills, but also to fill a co-curricular void (Eklund-Leen & Young, 1997). This is great news for all colleges and universities, particularly the community college where this study was conducted.

The theme of belonging and relationships from this study offers implications for the educational community because it provides administrators of community college leadership programs with the first guideline for success. This theme offers program facilitators advice when creating a program about initiating teambuilding activities during the early stages of the curriculum to promote interaction through a social process. This social process becomes a positive one when it is facilitated in a structured environment with the content promoting
positive change. An additional implication stemming from this theme is the importance of preserving the emphasis of leadership training for later in the curriculum. It is now known given this study’s findings that leadership training is more effective once students have become comfortable enough with their peers to openly practice and learn new skills.

**Community College Students’ Participation in a Leadership Program Can Increase Their Self-confidence**

Almost all of the literature on leadership, leadership training, and leadership skill-building suggests that self-confidence can be increased through leadership education (Astin, 1999; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Komives, 2005; Tinto, 1987). The effects tend to be comparable to those gleaned by students involved in other student organizations, including an increase in self-confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to lead others (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkardt, 1999). This study’s theme of self-confidence resulting from participation in a leadership program is not groundbreaking by any means. This subject was discussed as a premise of the researcher’s problem of practice and theoretical framework and was confirmed throughout the literature review. The design of this study allowed the researcher to understand which particular aspects of the leadership training may have contributed to the increase in self-confidence, particularly within the community college demographic.

As stated by Chickering and Reisser (1993), emotion management of all college students, immediately out of high school or otherwise, includes such feelings as fear, anxiety, anger, boredom, depression, guilt, and shame. These emotions have the power to detract from education while at college if they are untreated or become excessive. The second vector within the theoretical framework places great emphasis on the awareness of the aforementioned
emotions and the management of them through knowledge and recognition. These emotions can
and should be treated as signals through which to seek a better understanding.

As Komives et al. (2005) reported in their study of leadership identity, self-confidence
can be built. This researcher sought to illuminate the particular process of gaining confidence
through leadership skills. Astin (1999) offered, in essence, that leadership development is
synonymous with confidence enhancement. Though the researcher does agree on some
accounts, this theory may work in reverse, at least according to the results of this study. It would
appear students must first be comfortable, gain confidence, then be ready to practice and learn
from leadership development activities. Komives et al. (2005) in their development of a
grounded theory suggested as students’ confidence increased, “they were willing to take risks to
get more involved and were empowered to take on more active group roles” (p. 606). This
statement is supported by the results of this study as an increase in self-confidence opened the
doors to new learning, in this case leadership training.

This study supports Komives et al.’s (2005) empirical data and adds that confidence can
be built in several ways, though it may be different at the community college level. According to
this study, community college students gain their confidence by first interacting with others,
getting comfortable, then learning in a supportive environment whereby participants can refine
their leadership skills. In many studies (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Komives et al., 2005;
Tinto, 1987; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkardt, 1999), the populations studied were students at
four-year colleges and universities. The researcher found the primary difference in community
college students attaining self-confidence was the need to first feel comfortable in their
environment before practicing a skill in front of others. This is important to program
administrators, as it is critical for professionals to understand if these development activities are meeting the desired outcomes (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhart, 1999).

This finding suggests that community college students can gain confidence from building leadership skills as part of their overall student development. The process should be intentional, as students must first feel a sense of belonging prior to allowing themselves to be susceptible to skill development. Once they allow themselves to practice new leadership skills, they continue to increase their self-confidence levels.

An increased self-confidence level as a finding from this study offers implications for the educational community, particularly for designers of community college student leadership programs. Many leadership programs are designed with outcomes in mind (e.g., an increase in self-confidence) which is important, but outcomes can only be measured when an atmosphere has been created for students to attain the stated outcomes. The implication for practitioners is to enable participants to succeed by building the foundation of comfort through positive relationship building, facilitating student interaction with their peers to create a sense of belonging, and then offering leadership skills for students to practice. It is only after all of these steps have been achieved that students will begin learning new skills, and it is the leadership skill development that helps with the continued increase in self-confidence.

**Leadership Training Can Increase Self-awareness and Self-monitoring among Community College Students**

Community college students have demonstrated self-awareness and self-monitoring following participation in a student leadership program. This finding supports the assertion of Cooper, et al. (1994) that self-management often is an outcome of a leadership program.
Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) student development theory helped significantly to understand the interviewees’ comments in constructing this theme.

The literature on awareness and monitoring is scant, though there are many constructs within each component worth mentioning. In several studies (Astin, 1993; Brungardt, 1996; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Komives et al., 2005) awareness is separated into perception and role attainment. In regards to monitoring, it appears being a self-monitor is an advanced stage of leadership development by understanding others’ perceptions and expectations. In these studies, when an individual is placed in a leadership role, the perception of others becomes apparent. When a leader must be cognizant of others’ perceptions, he becomes a self-monitor. In congruence with the theoretical framework utilized for this study, the ability to monitor and interpret others’ values and views is an important principle of vector seven (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Community college students are very similar to four-year students in some ways. Two-year and four-year students alike can learn that it is possible to understand perceptions of others and be aware of one’s own traits and abilities. Empirical data suggests students who participate in a leadership program attain conversational awareness (Cress et al., 2001). Although this is only one aspect of self-monitoring, it is a primary characteristic of understanding perceptions. Additionally, the ability to monitor actions and interactions as a student leader is a learned ability. This study supports much of the existing literature about personal awareness and monitoring and reminds practitioners of the importance for community college students to have a foundation on which to build. This foundation must first be constructed with positive relationships, a sense of belonging, and self-confidence. Once students have achieved these initial phases, they are comfortable enough to reflect and discuss feedback openly. It is from this
feedback that interviewees found they permitted others to give honest comments about perceptions regarding a leader’s traits, abilities, and social interaction. This feedback and analysis was discovered to be similar data to that of Komives et al. (2005) as their research described the importance of understanding others’ expectations. Finally, this new empirical data adds to the theoretical framework that guided this study by offering a method through which to solicit personal evaluation. The “feedback forum” offered in the community college student leadership program provides an assessment of peer-to-peer interaction. Chickering and Reisser (1993) placed emphasis on developing congruence-matching personal values with socially responsible behavior. This advice is well taken and supplemented with a method to educate students about acceptable behaviors.

These findings suggest that community college students are not all that different from their four-year counterparts once they have gained comfort in a student leadership program environment. Once the community college population is allowed to adapt to their new atmosphere and gain comfort, they are just as likely to avail themselves of feedback and positive criticism of their traits and abilities. These findings also suggest that community college students have the ability to be placed in a leadership role while monitoring their own actions following participation in such a position.

The researcher offers implications for the educational community, as it is recommended that leadership program administrators build reflection and feedback sessions into the curriculum. Understanding that both peer-to-peer criticism and observations from program instructors can help students learn how they are perceived, it is important to intentionally incorporate this type of interaction for students to learn about themselves. This study has
established that when student leaders are more aware of themselves and are monitoring their own actions, there is a better chance of enhancing their image as a leader.

**Personal Assessment within a Leadership Program Can Offer Community College Students Further Understanding of Their Personal Identity**

The literature examined placed a great emphasis on leadership identity and the importance of student leadership programs anticipating identity as an outcome. Being able to establish identity includes being able to understand and solidify a sense of self (Reisser, 1995). Beyond discovering a sense of self, college students are concerned with how they look, the perception of others, and their place in peer groups. The establishment of identity draws from many facets of the first four vectors of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) student development theory by managing emotions, connectedness, and relationships, and becoming competent overall with critical thinking skills. Furthermore, establishing an identity for college students means to find their place within a culture or society (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

As documented earlier, once community college students become more aware of their behaviors they begin to establish a foundation for their leadership abilities. These abilities will forge an identity, specifically in the student leadership program, because of what Komives et al. (2005) have deemed “immersion” (p. 607). Students in the leadership program are immersed in the practicing of leadership skills and are constantly asked to reflect and describe a time when certain skills would be useful, their comfort level with such skills, and if there has been any change in their definition of leadership. Komives et al. (2005) found that leadership identity happens through six phases (p. 606). This researcher would like to differ slightly and view identity through a more macro lens as personal identity, not simply leadership identity, allowing students to learn about themselves in many aspects. Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) student
development theory helped guide the researcher in synthesizing the interview data concerning the establishment of identity. Community college students reported a sense of belonging and feeling part of a culture stemming from participation in the leadership program. The findings from this study were supported with Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory which suggested establishing an identity meant college students were finding their place in society, within a culture, or other functional group.

Research from Komives et al. (2005) specified leadership identity of individuals and separated many segments within. This was helpful to the researcher as the data helped decipher between the broad term identity and leadership identity. This study supports the development of personal identity for participating members in the community college student leadership program. There was not, however, data to suggest that an individual’s leadership identity was enhanced. This separation was a critical aspect of the study informed by the literature. A conclusion could not be drawn with any certainty from this study regarding leadership identity development which is why personal identity remained the constant theme.

This finding suggests that community college student leadership programs have the ability to help participants gain a sense of who they are. Through a variety of reflection and feedback forums and several observations by peers and instructors, students are equipped to further understand who they are as individuals. Community college student leadership programs must also include a form a self-evaluation and assessment. Personal assessment programs can help to further learn about an individual’s strengths, weaknesses, traits, and abilities. This same type of instrument can also be used as a supplemental tool to allow students to learn about who they work best with in groups and teams given their personality. This is important for understanding group roles and the importance of diverse viewpoints when making decisions.
It is now known that there is a need for student leaders to receive constant feedback, evaluation, and observation. Further, the data from this study overwhelmingly suggests for community college student leadership program administrators to include personal assessment strategies in the curriculum. This finding also supports the need for community college students to learn about who they are and their place in a culture and society. Once community college students are comfortable in their environment, have positive relationships with their peers, gain confidence, and begin to monitor themselves more closely, they begin to understand more about who they truly are. This process is clearly an evolution from comfort with others to the gaining of comfort with the self.

**The Completion of a Leadership Program has Implications for Increasing Community College Student Participants’ Willingness to take Initiative**

While the literature on student leadership is vast, the literature on community college students and their participation in leadership programs is sparse and incomplete. The aim of this study was to contribute to the literature on community college students by asking students about their experiences. One of the most intriguing findings from this study is a participant’s willingness to take initiative following completion of the student leadership program. Students are ready to apply their newly learned skills from the leadership program into other avenues of society. Komives et al. (2005) found this application of new skills to be an aspect of a student’s leadership identity.

Komives et al. (2005) described the seeking of applying new skills as part of a student’s leadership identity. Although this was a desired goal of the leadership program, it was not the only result. The second outcome was that student participants were also seeking more involvement to build more meaningful relationships. The seeking of more
relationships emerges to tie all of these themes together in a cyclical manner, as both the starting and continuation of meaningful relationships appear constant. Komives et al. (2005) found meaningful involvement to be “the training ground where leadership identity evolved” (p. 598).

This same path must include prioritizing and making commitments in order to accomplish the desired goals (Reisser, 1995). Additional studies have consistently concluded that students who maintain constant positive interaction with faculty have a better chance of increasing their personal development and satisfaction with the overall college experience (Astin, 1984). Three tenets within the sixth vector of the theoretical framework for students to consider when seeking the development of purpose are to make vocational plans and aspirations, identify personal interests, and recognize interpersonal commitments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Yukl (1994) characterized traits of effective leaders as being ambitious individuals who tend to be achievement-oriented, able to adapt to situations, cognizant of social environments, and willing to assume responsibility. It appears that effective leaders have been created through the student leadership program when utilizing Yukl’s (1994) definition. Community college students seek more responsibility and demonstrate persistence and follow through with their commitments. Chickering and Reisser (1993) might agree with the researcher’s assertion as they described instrumental independence as being able to create an idea and implement the plan through action. Success in vector three of the student development theory relies on being free from the constant seeking of approval or affection. Although there was not any clear data to confirm or disprove the need for approval or affection, it was apparent student leaders felt more independent following their participation in the leadership program. Additionally, separation
from dependence on peers and family for unwavering support and the ability to take risks to pursue interests and convictions are indicators of independence.

Following the leadership program, students found themselves seeking more opportunities for development both on and off campus. Students wanted to start the cycle over again by meeting new people and establishing positive, meaningful relationships. As a result of this study, the researcher can appropriately characterize community college student leaders as effective leaders following participation in the student leadership program. This assertion comes as a result of students being more independent, seeking responsibility, and needing more positive relationships.

These findings suggest that students who participate in a community college student leadership program will emerge more willing to participate in other organizations. Trained student leaders make valuable additions to athletic teams, student organizations, service projects, and civic initiatives, given their willingness to accept responsibility. Reisser (1995) asserted that the ability to make and keep these types of commitments is yet another positive trait of being a student leader. Given this information, students who participate in a community college student leadership program will be highly sought after by campus and community organizations. Further, new students will be recommended for acceptance into the leadership program to eventually develop as effective student leaders.

The willingness of student leaders to take initiative following participation in a community college student leadership program has an impact on educational practices for the community college arena. Administrators must take into consideration when organizing such a program that other ways of becoming involved on or off campus should be offered. Further, it is important to move participants through all stages of the leadership program cycle and be
prepared to offer the same support for new endeavors. Once community college students in a leadership program feel a sense of belonging, while creating positive relationships, they gain confidence. In a subsequent phase of the cycle, these same students gain confidence and begin to monitor themselves and adopt an awareness of their actions and interactions. Following the awareness stage, student leaders learn about themselves through a variety of methods. After these participants have completed the initial sequence of development in a student leadership program, they are willing to accept more responsibility and seek to begin the cycle again with new relationships.

**Significance**

The findings from this study provide scholar practitioners with a considerable level of insight and understanding of community college students’ perceptions of their leadership training. Prior to this study, very little empirical evidence has been available from the community college population about their participation in a student leadership program. The emergent themes provide a foundation for further research and provide direction and guidance for leadership program administrators at the community college level. The findings from this study offer new knowledge to the wide gap in the literature surrounding community college students’ experiences with leadership programming.

These findings have particular significance for community college leadership program administrators. Following a thorough literature review, to the researcher’s knowledge this study has produced the first complete assessment of the leadership development cycle for community college students. Although many studies of similar proportions have been completed with four-year students, the community college demographic is considerably different. Further, the leadership cycle can provide interested higher education professionals with a curriculum (see
Appendix L) for establishing a student leadership program at a community college given the various components mentioned throughout the analysis. The rich data explicated from the student leaders interviewed offers first-hand accounts of what can lead to a successful program. Finally, a successful program can be defined as a community college student leadership program which produces effective leaders.

The researcher has established a model explaining the themes extracted from the raw data compiled from participant interviews in this study. The model, the cyclical nature of the themes, and the recommended curriculum shall all serve as the researcher’s contribution to the existing gap in empirical data that surrounds community college student leaders. The findings of this study are not necessarily transferable to other colleges or universities, though the researcher can certainly offer that the best chance for transferability would be for other community colleges, particularly those with a full campus life, to adopt the model.

**Implications for Practice**

Although the researcher offers transferability as a limitation of this study, many of the findings can be offered for adaptation to existing practices. Educational practitioners working with student leaders, particularly at the community college level, can gain an understanding while saving time and resources by adhering to advice and recommendations from this study. Many implications exist including the importance of intentionally establishing all of the components of the leadership program in an effort to attain all of the possible outcomes for participants. As a recommendation from the researcher to community college leadership program facilitators, there are several key aspects to organizing a successful program. Aside from the themes derived from this study, the researcher recommends for program administrators
to enlist an enthusiastic and charismatic facilitator. It is critical to have a proven leader, preferably one with an engaging personality, to lead students through the phases of the cycle.

Remembering how nervous students are when entering the program, it is up to the leadership program facilitator to immediately begin introducing participants and facilitate activities to make students comfortable. Further, in order to attain a comfortable learning environment, the facilitator must maintain a minimal anxiety level, particularly in the earliest phase of the leadership cycle when students are initially building relationships and establishing their comfort zone. As the leadership program advances, the facilitator’s role is less critical though it has been expressed by the interviewees of this study that having consistency is important to their leadership development. Additionally, it is recommended that leadership program facilitators be trained on implementing the community college leadership program curriculum prior to execution. Given the sensitive nature of the content discussed as part of the feedback forum, it is necessary to establish a safe place. This practice takes repetition to become versed in the process and establish trust among and within participants.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

After completing this study about leadership training with community college students, it is apparent more research should be conducted with this population. Given the themes from participants’ detailed accounts of their experiences, it is important to gather more data. The researcher is recommending conducting research in additional areas to further understand community college students’ experiences with leadership programs.

It is recommended for this study to be disaggregated as the researcher’s participants were all Caucasian. It is suggested for a researcher to conduct a study with a group of community college students of color with similar characteristics. A study of this nature could extend the
work of this study while offering additional data from an understudied population. Another study could also add elements of geographical and individual diversity not incorporated. Several versions of this type of study could be conducted, with at least one coming from a researcher external to the student leadership program. It is unknown if the established cyclical model could occur in a different sequence and achieve the same or better results. This study should be duplicated with other community college leadership programs to see if there is consistency among themes and the order in which they arise. The final recommendation for future research is to conduct research on community college students’ experiences following participation in a leadership program and specifically investigate the connection to Komives et al.’s (2005) findings about leadership identity.

**Conclusion**

In relation to the literature reviewed prior to this study, the findings from this particular research contribute to an understanding of community college students and their participation in a leadership program. There is now a curriculum, model, and cycle of phases available to other higher education professionals interested in implementing a student leadership program on their campus. Following this study, the researcher can conclude that community college students can develop their leadership skills and abilities as a result of participation in a leadership program.

The researcher claims, with a reasonable degree of assurance, that this study can help to understand community college student leaders’ needs and their development process following their participation in a leadership program. Further, it can be suggested that community college student leaders must meet a certain criteria to be considered effective. The criterion for community college student leaders to be effective is the completion of the leadership cycle, which includes gaining comfort, gaining confidence, monitoring themselves, understanding
personal identity, and eventually be willing to take initiative. This aspect is similar to much of the general body of leadership literature available. The claim that has been made from the findings of this study, about the usefulness of understanding community college student leaders’ developmental phases, remains constant. This study can offer a framework for an effective community college student leadership development program.

Much of the empirical data available to educators is taken from four-year schools with an entirely different population. From that perspective, this study may be useful to community college administrators. In some regards the community college population is an under-researched commodity, even if they do make up the majority of our college population. It is still unknown following this study at exactly what point students begin to see themselves as leaders. Although it can be estimated this realization occurs during the personal identity phase, there is some uncertainty about when they view themselves as campus leaders.

The findings from this study answer the question “how do community college students perceive and describe their experiences with leadership training”? The findings provide support for creating a program of this nature at community colleges. The benefits can lead to retention, student satisfaction, and vibrant campus life. Having effective student leaders running organizations and contributing to campus teams and committees makes for a positive and supportive campus culture. These findings are important and should matter to all members of the campus community.

After conducting research in the area of student leadership programming with community college students, many conclusions can be drawn. Of the many conclusions, the five primary suppositions the researcher developed are based on the themes established in the process of this study. These themes propose that community college students seek a sense of belonging via
positive relationships, their participation in a leadership program can increase self-confidence, leadership training can help to increase self-awareness and self-monitoring, personal assessment within a leadership program offers a further understanding of personal identity, and the completion of a leadership program has shown to increase participants’ willingness to take initiative following this study.

Community college students seek a sense of belonging. This demographic wants to feel as though they are part of something which can be accomplished by joining clubs, organizations, a sports team, or other informal groups on campus. What became apparent during this study was the fact that students who chose to be part of the leadership program felt a sense of belonging with a welcoming atmosphere, comfortable environment, and place to better themselves. There is something to be said for fostering an atmosphere where people feel comfortable to try new skills and become better through practice. An environment of this nature allows individuals to learn about themselves and others. This type of descriptive statement was echoed throughout the study. The student leadership program provided a sense of connection which encouraged growth and development.
References


Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE), *Making Connections: Dimensions of Student Engagement* (2009 CCSSE Findings), the University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program. Retrieved from www.ccsse.org/publications


Appendix A: Permission to Contact Participants

We are all teachers. We are all learners.

June 28, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

As the department head of Business Administration and member of the Student Leadership Team at NHTI, Concord’s Community College, I am writing in support of Charles (Chuck) Lloyd. Please allow this letter to serve as formal support and permission for his study about Community College Students' Experiences with a Student Leadership Program (IRB# 12-05-10) to occur at NHTI.

The primary focus of this supplemental letter is to offer permission to utilize the contact information of the participants of our campus student leadership program as an external researcher. It is my understanding access to these participants is critical to the study and Chuck, as the program administrator, will remain unbiased. Further, this research study is supported by the Student Leadership Team as we await the results of the study.

Please consider this additional support letter as permission to have full access to the students in the leadership program in an effort to recruit them for the proposed study. If you require any further information or would like to speak with me, I may be reached at 603-271-8880 or mhunt@ccsnh.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

Martha A. Hunt

Prof. Martha A. Hunt

Department Head

Business Administration

Advisor - Student Senate

Vice President, Student Leadership Team
Appendix B: Letter to Participants

Dear Student Leadership Program Participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. The goal of the study is to understand how community college students describe their experiences with leadership training. It is critical to learn if the program offerings are meeting the desired outcomes by preparing students to be leaders. The leadership training is aimed at developing students to lead student organizations and eventually become leaders in business and industry. Since there is very little empirical data available with the community college demographic and their experiences with leadership training, it is unknown if existing programs are effective. This lack of knowledge borders on becoming an epidemic as over fifty percent of all college students are attending a community college.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have completed at least one semester of the student leadership program, have maintained academic eligibility to return to the program, and have been involved in a student organization on campus. If you do choose to be part of this study, more information will be provided and an informed consent form will need to be signed.

As part of the study you will be asked to recall specific episodes, situations, or events that you experienced through your leadership training. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you: your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience. This information will be guided by the study’s primary research question: How do community college students perceive and describe their experiences with leadership training?

During this research, you will be asked to meet for an interview of approximately sixty to ninety minutes. You will then be asked to remain available via normal communication methods until the study is complete (approximately six months after the interview) for member checking and clarification. You will be interviewed and the data from the interview will be audio taped, transcribed, and excerpts will be entered into the study findings as necessary. There will not be any use of deception for the duration of this study.

If you have questions right now, please ask. If you have additional questions later, you may contact me at clloyd@ccsnh.edu or 603-271-8905. You may also contact the faculty member who supervises this research, Dr. Joseph McNabb, at j.mcnabb@neu.edu or 857-205-9598.

Charles Lloyd
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

| Northeastern University, Department: College of Professional Studies |
| Investigator Name: Charles R. Lloyd (Under Joseph McNabb, Ph.D) |
| Title of Project: Community College Students’ Experiences with a Student Leadership Program |

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

**Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have completed at least one semester of the student leadership program, have maintained academic eligibility to return to the program, and have been involved in a student organization on campus.

**Why is this research study being done?**

*The purpose of this study is to gain further understanding about the student leadership program and its’ effectiveness by hearing from participants about their experiences.*

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to meet with the researcher for approximately an hour to answer questions about your experiences from the leadership program. This meeting, or interview, will be conducted in a comfortable atmosphere and will be audio taped for future transcription. Even if you decide not to participate in this study, you are still encouraged to maintain membership in the student leadership program.

**Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?**

You will be interviewed at a convenient time and place for you. This can be anywhere from a coffee shop, to a conference room as long as the surroundings are conducive to interviewing and audiotaping. The interview is estimated to take one hour and will not last longer than ninety minutes.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

No. There will be no physical harm.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

You, and all future participants in the student leadership program will benefit from the findings of this study as the data will be utilized for enhancing program offerings.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers in this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way. Participants will be identified in the write up of the findings only as participant one, participant two, etc. The researcher will be the only one who knows which participant is matched with which interviewee and the name key will be kept
locked in the researcher’s private residence. Following the submission of the research findings the name key will be destroyed. Audiotapes will also be destroyed following submission of the document.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a member of the student leadership program.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have questions right now, please ask. If you have additional questions later, you may contact me at clloyd@ccsnh.edu or 603-271-8905. You may also contact the faculty member who supervises this research, Dr. Joseph McNabb, at j.mcnabb@neu.edu or 857-205-9598.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
No.

Is there anything else I need to know?
This research is being completed as a requirement for a doctoral program at Northeastern University.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________ ______ __________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix D: Thank You Letter to Participants

July 12, 2012

Dear Research Participant,

Thank you for meeting with me for the interview and sharing your experience with leadership training. I appreciate your willingness to share your unique and personal thoughts, feelings, events, and situations.

I will be in contact with you when the interview has been transcribed to meet and go over the content. Be sure to ask yourself if this interview has fully captured your experience with leadership training. After reviewing the transcript of the interview, you may realize that an important experience or experiences may have been neglected. Please feel free to add comments at that point that would further elaborate your experience(s). At this juncture, you will not be asked to edit for grammatical corrections. The way you told your story is what is critical.

When you have reviewed the verbatim transcript and have had an opportunity to make changes and additions, I will only ask that you maintain availability via normal communication methods until the study is complete.

I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your experience. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 603-867-0342 or via email at clloyd@ccsnh.edu.

With warm regards,

Charles Lloyd
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Charles Lloyd successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 09/09/2009

Certification Number: 286276
Appendix F: Interview Questions

Warm-up Question
Tell me a little about yourself. For example, do you like sports, music, science, art?

Central Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your life with as much detail as possible up until the time you began the student leadership program.
   a. Additional prompts: Could you please describe _________ in more depth for me? What was _________ like for you?

2. Please tell me about some experiences with friends.
   a. Additional prompts: What was your group of friends like? What did you feel was your role in this group?

3. Please tell me about some experiences with other students.
   a. Additional prompts: What was school like for you? What were your roles on teams or in organizations? What kind of student were you?

4. Please tell me about some experiences with colleagues at work.
   a. Additional prompts: What, if any, training was provided? What was it like? What were your colleagues like?

5. Please tell me about some experiences with your neighborhoods.
   a. Additional prompts: Could you describe the make-up of your neighbors? What relationships were present? (Chickering, Vector Two)

6. Please describe the student leadership program.
   a. Additional prompts: Can you tell me more about that?

7. Please walk me through a session of leadership training within the program from the moment you show up to the moment you leave.
   a. Additional prompts: Can you further explain that point? Can you give me a specific example?

8. Describe your experience with leadership training.
   a. Additional prompts: Can you tell me more about that?

9. Please tell me a story about your experience within the student leadership program.
   a. Additional prompts: Can you tell me more about that?

10. How do you feel after participating in the student leadership program?
11. How has your competence with leadership skill development been affected by the program? (Chickering, Vector One)

12. How has participation in the student leadership program affected other areas of your college experience?

13. What roles do you play on campus in which participation in the student leadership program has affected your abilities?

14. Given what you have said about your earlier life, school, work, relationships, and experiences with leadership training, how do you understand leadership in your life?
   a. Additional prompts: What sense does it make to you?

15. Given what you have reconstructed over the course of this interview, where do you see yourself going in the future? (Chickering, Vector Six)
   a. Additional prompts: How has participation in the leadership program affected your future?

16. To what extent do you consider yourself active in campus life?
   a. Additional Prompts: How do you see your involvement as contributing to your development? (Chickering, Vector Three)

17. Describe your perceptions and feelings about your campus involvement. (Chickering, Vector two)

18. Are there things that you changed about yourself as a result of your leadership experiences? (Chickering, Vector Five)

19. If I were a potential student participant considering membership in the student leadership program, how would you describe the program?

   Wrap up Questions

1. Do you have anything to add?

2. Is there anything I should have asked?

3. How did the interview feel for you?
Appendix G: Interview Guide

Prior to the initial interview, the interviewer will obtain Informed Consent Forms signed by participant

The Interviewer will bring the following to the interviews:

- An audio taping device
- Interview guide
- Copies of the signed consent forms
- Debriefing statement

During each interview, the interviewer will do the following:

- Greet participant
- Reintroduce topic briefly and explain interview procedures
- Answer any questions
- Provide participant with a copy of their informed consent
- Explain that some questions may cause momentary discomfort or unhappiness and participants can refuse to answer any questions they perceive as embarrassing or threatening
- Explain that the interviewer is interested in hearing about their personal experiences
- Inform participant that in order to preserve confidentiality, please refrain from disclosing their name or the names of friends, relatives, faculty members, or anyone else during the interview
- Start audio taping device
- Conduct interview
- Thank participant at the end of the interview

Because of the nature of this study other questions may arise in the context of the interview

Chickering’s student development theory (to reference during interviews)

1. Developing competence
2. Managing emotions
3. Moving through autonomy toward interdependence
4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships
5. Establishing identity
6. Developing purpose
7. Developing Integrity
June 6, 2012

Charles Lloyd
NHTI – Concord’s Community College
31 College Drive
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Mr. Lloyd,

I am pleased to advise you that the NHTI Institute Leadership Team, which serves as the IRB of the college, has reviewed and approved your research proposal: *Community College Students' Experiences with a Student Leadership Program*. Your research project proposes to understand how community college students perceive and describe their experiences with leadership training as a method to assess the efficacy of the NHTI Student Leadership Program. In agreeing to participate, your subjects will include three to four current students who are participants in the Student Leadership Program at NHTI, and their confidentiality will be maintained. You will be conducting interviews, transcribing and analyzing those results. This research proposal is a component of your doctoral research program at Northeastern University, under Principal Investigator Joseph W. McNabb, Ph.D.

As with all research proposals, we look forward to learning of your results, and would invite you to present to the Institute Leadership Team, either through sharing your narrative results, or making a presentation in person.

Please let me know if you have any questions and best wishes in your research.

Sincerely,

Beth Blankenstein
Beth Blankenstein
Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs

NHTI-Concord's Community College
31 College Drive, North Hall 105
Concord, NH 03301-7412
Email: bblankenstein@CCSNH.edu
Appendix I: IRB Approval from Northeastern University

Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action

Date: July 2, 2012          IRB #: 12-05-10
Principal Investigator(s): Joseph McNabb
Charles Lloyd
Department: College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 BV
Northeastern University
Title of Project: Community College Students' Experiences with a Student Leadership Program
Participating Sites: NHTI – Concord's Community College – approval received
Informed Consent: One (1) signed consent
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

Approval Expiration Date: JULY 1, 2013

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

[Signatures]
C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #: 4630
Appendix J: Community College Student Leadership Development Cycle

![Diagram of Community College Student Leadership Development Cycle]

- Willingness to take initiative
- Increased self-confidence
- Sense of belonging and positive relationships
- Understanding of personal identity
- Increased self-awareness and self-monitoring
## Building Effective Community College Student Leaders:  
A Curriculum for Program Administrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anticipated Outcome</th>
<th>Associated Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced sense of belonging</td>
<td>A progression of icebreaking activities to teambuilding exercises and concluding with team challenge applications*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased positive relationships</td>
<td>The establishment of a comfortable environment involving all stakeholders complete with social norms, acceptable behaviors, and the understanding of open and honest communication. Following the creating of a conductive learning environment, the presentation of leadership skills* is supported while allowing students ample time to practice new skills until they attain a comfort level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-awareness and self-monitoring</td>
<td>Following the practicing of newly learned leadership skills, begin the “Feedback Forum”* by having students meet in groups to give each other feedback, then having student leaders solicit feedback from the greater group, and finally allowing student leaders to meet with their mentors. Add the perception-reading activity* with open communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased understanding of personal identity</td>
<td>Allow student leaders to participate in an individual assessment program (<em>True Colors, StrengthsQuest, Myers-Briggs etc.</em>). Facilitate understanding of the results in conjunction with the ramifications for working with others in groups and teams. Conduct the “Feedback Forum” with the results to allow students to further investigate the meaning and relevance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The willingness to take initiative</td>
<td>Provide opportunities for student leaders to practice their new skills and find new, positive relationships in a controlled atmosphere. This can include taking on roles in student organizations, being a resident assistant, performing class presentations, presenting to high school students via college access programs, volunteering as an orientation leader, or commit to join a variety of groups and teams*.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For specific activities and descriptions please contact Chuck Lloyd
Appendix L: Researcher Curriculum Vitae

Charles R. Lloyd, Ed.D.
Curriculum Vitae

Education
Doctor of Education with a concentration in Higher Education Administration
Northeastern University, Boston, Ma, 2013
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies with a concentration in Educational Leadership
Plymouth State University, Plymouth, NH, 2010
Master of Education with a concentration in Higher Education
Plymouth State University, Plymouth, NH, 2007
Bachelor of Science with a concentration in Physical Education and Teacher Certification
Keene State College, Keene, NH, 2002
Associate of Science with a concentration in Chemical Dependency
Keene State College, Keene, NH, 2002

Professional Experience
2002-Present: Director of Student Life, NHTI, Concord’s Community College
2008-Present: Professor of Business, NHTI, Concord’s Community College
2008-Present: Member of the Community College Student Leadership Association (CCSLA)
2007-Present: Campus Compact for New Hampshire Operations Board Member
2005-Present: National Conference on Student Leadership (NCSL) Board member
2004-Present: Workshop presenter and Master of Ceremonies for ACUI, CCSLA, and NCSL
2003-2011: Assistant Men’s Basketball Coach, NHTI, Concord’s Community College
2001-2002: Physical Education Student Teacher, Keene, NH and Conval Regional High Schools
1999-2001: Building Manager, Lloyd P. Young Student Center, Keene State College

Presentations
2012: Colby-Sawyer College specified leadership training
2012: Mount Wachusett Community College Leadership Retreat Presenter
2012: Community College Leadership Association Conference Emcee and workshop presenter
2012: Project Lead The Way Keynote Speaker
2012: Running Start Program Keynote Speaker
2011: Student Leadership Institute Presenter and Facilitator (Australia)
2010: Keene State College, College Access Conference Keynote Speaker
2010: Student Outreach for Leadership Initiating Development Conference Keynote Speaker
2009-Present: Lakes Region Community College, College Access Conference Keynote Speaker
2009: National Center for Student Leadership Conference Emcee (Boston)
2008-Present: Community College Student Leadership Association Conference Presenter
2008: Association of Managers of Student Unions Conference Presenter (Scotland)
2008: Manchester Community College Orientation Keynote Speaker
2007: ConnectNH Conference workshop presenter
2005-Present: National Center for Student Leadership Conference Presenter (Orlando, Atlanta, San Diego, Nashville)
2005: Association of College Unions International Conference Presenter (Ireland)
Publications
In Press: Student Leaders take the “Leap” at NHTI, Concord’s Community College in The Collegian
2007: Union Spotlight: NHTI Student Center in The Bulletin

Certification
American Red Cross First Aid and CPR Professional Rescuer
Certified New Hampshire Defensive Driver
Certified Coach by the ASEP/NFICEP standards
Certified New Hampshire K-12 Physical Education Instructor
Certified in Protecting Human Research Participants: Certification number: 286276

Honors and Awards
2011: Recipient of the 2011 Campus Event Planner of the Year Award from Power Performers’ Excellence Awards
2009: Recipient of the 2009 Campus Event Planner of the Year Award from Power Performers’ Excellence Awards
2007: Recipient of the Commissioner’s Award for Service Excellence from the Community College System of New Hampshire
2006: Recipient of the Service Learning Leadership Award from NHTI, Concord’s Community College
2004: Nominated for the Outstanding New Professional Award through the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals