

TITLE The Leadership Behaviors of College Freshmen

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OBJECTIVE The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to determine if a difference exists between leadership behaviors of male and female college freshmen and the amount of extra or co-curricular activities they participated in during high school.

METHODOLOGY

Participants consisted of 98 male and 84 female incoming college freshmen attending a mid-size Catholic university located in the Great Lakes region of the United States (response rate = 53%). Participants completed the Student version of the Leadership Practices Inventory and provided information about the nature of their high-school activities (both volume and number of hours – low, moderate, high, or very high categories).

KEY FINDINGS

Results from the ANOVA indicated that a weak positive difference of leadership behaviors did exist between college freshmen for three of the five sub-scales of the S-LPI (Model, Inspire, and Encourage) when assessed by volume of participation but not by hours of participation. However, statistical significance was only found between the very high participation group and the low participation group for Model and the very high and high groups and the low participation group for Inspire and Encourage. All effect sizes were small, accounting for only 6.3% to 7.3% of the variance in scores based on levels of participation. The author suggests that “this effect may have a meaningful contribution to leadership development, especially in the nascent stages of leadership development. These findings suggest a threshold effect maybe have been in operation, where differences were only seen once a minimum level of participation volume was reached” (p. 100).

ANOVA indicated that female students had a statistically significant difference than their male counterparts, based on volume of participation, only in the leadership practice of Encourage. Again, the effect size was very small, accounting for only 2.9% of the total variance. No statistically significant differences found between males and females were found for any of the participation levels based on hours of participation.

The author concludes:

Volume of participation, or simply being involved, seems to have an influence on leadership development by potentially setting the stage for further development”... Therefore, participation might be the first step on the road to leadership development. Getting high school students involved in activities, regardless of their type, begins a process that can lead to leadership development, whether it is through holding formal position(s) or simply being in a program where leadership is emphasized (p. 104).

The author observes:

The level of intentionality of leadership development within an activity or program is critical. As mentioned in the first point, leadership development has been positively linked to students holding formal leadership roles within organizations. However, there are only a limited number of leadership positions within any organization. Unless a program or activity has a deliberate leadership development outcome (Massey et al., 2013), it is likely that only those students in leadership positions will reap the benefit of leadership development, and the other participants may not. Therefore, it is recommended that adults who are in charge of various high school extra and co-curricular activities determine whether or not leadership elements can be deliberately taught as a part of that program, and whenever possible incorporate leadership development as an aspect of that activity” (p. 105). And notes further: “it is recommended that high school students not only have a volume of participation in activities, but that those activities are of different types and not concentrated solely in a single domain such as athletics, academics, or the fine arts, but rather, a mixture of activities across those domains (p. 105).