Leadership for Whom? Socioeconomic Factors Predicting Undergraduate Students' Positional Leadership Participation

Dr. Krista M. Soria
Adjunct Professor, Leadership Minor
Analyst, Office of Institutional Research
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455
ksoria@umn.edu

Deeqa Hussein
Undergraduate Student, College of Liberal Arts
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455
huss0245@umn.edu

Carolyn Vue
Undergraduate Student, College of Biological Sciences
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455
vuexx211@umn.edu

Abstract

This study examined the associations between undergraduate students' socioeconomic background (i.e., first-generation status and household income) and their participation as positional leaders at six large, public research universities. Results from logistic regressions predicting positional leadership in student organizations suggested that first-generation students and students from low-income backgrounds were significantly less likely to participate in positional leadership positions controlling for demographic, environmental, and leadership interest variables.

Introduction

While recent leadership development scholarship has shifted focus away from traditional notions of positional leadership toward expanded theories of relational leadership (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005), positional leadership opportunities in college have long been recognized as important in promoting college students' development of important outcomes, including multicultural awareness, civic responsibility, and leadership ability (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). While students personally benefit from participation in positional leadership positions, campus communities also benefit because positional leaders exert a profound influence on the behaviors, values, and attitudes of their peers (Schueler,

Hoffman, & Peterson, 2009). Students who participate in leadership activities are also more committed to developing leadership in others and promoting understanding across diverse groups (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001), an additional benefit to the campus community.

Research exploring college students' participation in positional leadership has expanded our breadth of understanding about the potential benefits of leadership (Hall, Scott, & Borsz, 2008). Schwartz (1991) discovered that those who served as leaders in student government positions experienced long-term effects such as enhanced sense of moral awareness and personal responsibility. Schuh and Laverty (1983) found that college graduates who held leadership positions reported that their leadership roles had greatest impact on their development of teamwork, decision-making, leadership, and organizing/planning skills. Kuh and Lund (1994) also found that students who participated as leaders in student government reported yields in skills desirable to many employers: decision-making, an understanding and appreciation of fundamental organizational structures and processes, experiences with groups and teamwork, and communication skills.

Cooper, Healy, and Simpson (1994) also discovered that students who held leadership positions in student organizations scored higher than non-leaders on scales including developing purpose, educational involvement, career planning, lifestyle planning, cultural participation, and life management. Following those previous lines of inquiry, Logue, Hutchens, and Hector's (2005) more recent research suggested student leaders reported overwhelmingly positive experiences described in terms of career, personal, and academic success; had a nuanced understanding of the challenges of motivating others and the complexity of working in teams; and felt connected to their service to others and to contributing to the greater good.

Students who participate in positional leadership opportunities can also benefit by the virtue of their increased involvement on campus. Astin's (1993) comprehensive research affirmed the value of students' involvement in colleges and universities: students' peer interactions are positively related to students' leadership abilities, interpersonal skills, academic development, critical thinking skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, cultural awareness, college grade point average, and satisfaction with student life.

Yet, while prior research has affirmed the positive benefits of students' involvement and participation in leadership positions, there is a dearth of literature regarding the relationships among socioeconomic and demographic group membership and students' leadership development, participation, and capacity (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Some research in this area has pointed to the potential significance for these factors to impact students' leadership experiences; for example, Kezar & Moriarty (2000) found differences in the significance of positional leadership opportunities by race and gender while Astin (1993) found that leaders tended to have relatively affluent and well-educated parents. The purpose of the present study is to expand our understanding of the influence of these factors by investigating relationships between college students' socioeconomic background characteristics and their participation as leaders in student clubs and organizations.

These issues are important to all leadership educators, as leadership opportunities—both curricular and co-curricular—should be available to all college students regardless of their socioeconomic background. Leadership educators in a variety of positions play an important role on their campuses with regards to structuring leadership development, connecting students to leadership opportunities, and serving as role models and mentors to students in positional leadership roles. While this analysis is presently limited to exploring differences in college students' participation as positional leaders in co-curricular organizations,

the results may be generalizable to curricular opportunities as well; as a consequence, the results of this analysis can spark conversations and encourage leadership educators to reflect upon the equitable nature of leadership opportunities on their campuses.

Socioeconomic Differences: Implications for Students' Involvement in Higher Education

While obtaining a college degree is often viewed as a critical component of social mobility, first-generation students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to be eligible to attend college, enroll in college, and persist regardless of their academic ability than their peers from higher income families or those who are not the first in their families to graduate from college (Astin, 1993; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Cabrera, Burkhum, & La Nasa, 2005; Engle & O'Brien, 2007; McDonough, 1997; Tinto, 2006; Walpole, 2007). For students from lower social class and socioeconomic backgrounds, the longstanding effects of these disparities in educational attendance and attainment can yield many negative outcomes; consequently, examining potential disparities in first-generation and low-income students' college experiences—including their involvement as positional leaders of campus organizations—is important in understanding factors that may negatively influence their retention and degree attainment.

Among the various factors demonstrated to increase college students' success, scholars have noted that students' experiences in college are associated with important outcomes, including educational aspirations, persistence, and degree attainment (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Several hallmarks of the college experience are designed to intentionally foster students' integration, and in turn, their retention on campus (Tinto, 1993). For instance, scholars have frequently found involvement in extracurricular activities is positively associated with students' persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

Yet, some scholars have suggested that first-generation and low-income students are at a distinct disadvantage with regards to their participation in the types of extracurricular activities that can foster integration on campus. Walpole (2003) found that college students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds spent less time in student clubs and groups compared to students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, with nearly half of lower socioeconomic status students spending less than one hour a week in student organizations. Stuber (2011) suggested that students' social class background encouraged or discouraged their participation in student organizations and extracurricular activities; for example, Stuber (2011) found that, compared with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the cultural orientations of middle/upper-class students were so well honed that many students arrived at campus already involved in clubs, organizations, or programs.

When students participate in campus activities, they benefit through increased interactions with their peers. Students' interactions with their peers are highly important in fostering their social integration on campus and contributing to larger developmental outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students' interactions with peers can positively influence students' academic development, analytical and problem-solving skills, and self-esteem (Kuh, 1995). According to Astin (1993), peers are "the single most potent source of influence," affecting virtually every aspect of students' development—cognitive, affective, psychological, and behavioral (p. 398).

While the benefits of social and academically-oriented interactions with peers are clearly established, research suggests that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are better positioned to engage in interactions with peers because "feeling comfortable while on display and having the ability to talk to strangers, give them a firm handshake, and look them in the eye, have been framed as forms of cultural capital among the privileged class" (Stuber, 2011, p. 71)—factors that are often important in students' leadership efficacy. Additionally, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to work more hours while in college than their higher socioeconomic status peers, a factor that limits low-income students' ability to be involved in campus organizations (Walpole, 2003).

Barratt (2012) summarized the challenges for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, noting that students' perceptions and meaning making of their involvement is deeply affected by their social class of origin. These perceptions subsequently affect how—and why—students become involved in campus activities. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who perceive that student organizations do not include students from their similar social class backgrounds, or those who have little or no prior experience in leadership development, will not likely perceive the importance and meaning of such experiences in college and will therefore not actively participate in them.

Yet, amid those challenges, prior research has suggested low-income and first-generation students stand to gain a lot from involvement in student activities. Over the last several decades, prior scholars advocated that first-generation and low-income students possess lower social capital than their peers from college-educated families (Billson & Terry, 1982; Choy, 2001; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Social capital—privileged knowledge, resources, and information attained through social networks—is important to all students as they acclimate to college. In the context of higher education, social capital could refer, among other things, to understanding how to navigate the bureaucracy of the institution, effectively acquire "soft skills" or experiences desirable by employers, choose the right courses, and utilize support services when needed. In order to compensate, first-generation and low-income students can benefit from developing social networks in higher education in order to gain valuable social capital. Students' involvement in extracurricular activities can increase their social networks with institutional agents and cultural brokers who can transmit social capital (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007; Moschetti & Hudley, 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995) and build networks of belonging for students (Parks, 2000).

The aforementioned disparities in extracurricular involvement between students from different parental education and socioeconomic backgrounds—in conjunction with the additive benefits of extracurricular involvement for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—warrants further investigation within the field of college student leadership. In particular, this research study addresses the following research question: controlling for additional demographic and college experience factors, is there a relationship between students' socioeconomic background and involvement in positional leadership? Given the prior literature that suggests that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to be involved on campuses, we hypothesize that college students who are first-generation and come from lower-income backgrounds are less likely to participate as positional leadership in student organizations.

Methods

Instrument

The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey is based at the Center for Studies of Higher Education at the University of California-Berkeley. The SERU survey sampling plan is a census scan of the undergraduate experience—all undergraduates enrolled in degree-seeking programs are invited to participate in the electronic survey. In the SERU survey, each student answers questions based upon several research themes, including academic engagement, community and civic engagement, global knowledge and skills, and student life and development. We utilized items from the community and civic engagement module of the survey, which asks students questions about their participation as leaders in student organizations.

In spring 2012, the SERU survey was administered to 120,536 undergraduate students enrolled in six large, public universities classified by the Carnegie Foundation as having very high research activity. The institutions who participated in the survey administration had participated in prior administrations. The majority of institutions who participate in each administration delegate survey administration responsibilities to institutional research and assessment offices, who use their institutional data for assessment, research, and program review. The principal researcher in the present analysis received access to the survey data as a result of her professional affiliation with one of the campuses who administers the survey.

Participants

The institutional level completion response rate for the SERU survey in 2012 was 33% ($n = 39,777$). The majority of items used in this analysis were embedded in a community and civic engagement module of the SERU survey that was randomly assigned to 20% of students, thus limiting our sample size further ($n = 8,601$). White and female students were slightly overrepresented in the surveys compared with the populations at each institution. Table 1 provides additional data regarding the demographic composition of survey respondents. Approximately one-quarter of the sample included first-generation students—those with parents who had not earned a baccalaureate college degree.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Coding for Variables

Variables Used in Analysis	M	SD	Coding/Scale
Demographic/Socioeconomic			
Female	.60	.49	
African American	.05	.21	
Asian American	.15	.35	0 = no; 1 = yes
American Indian or Native American	.01	.10	

Hispanic or Latino	.08	.28	
Pacific Islander	.01	.04	
Multiracial	.01	.11	
First-generation	.23	.43	
Family income	3.59	1.44	1 = less than $19,999; 2 = $20,000 to $49,999; 3 = $50,000 to $79,999; 4 = $80,000 to $99,999; 5 = over $100,000

Leadership

Positional leader in a student organization or club	.28	.45	0 = no; 1 = yes
Opportunities to develop my leadership skills while here are important	4.76	1.12	1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree

College and Environmental

Off campus housing	.63	.48	
On campus housing	.28	.45	0 = no; 1 = yes
Fraternity or sorority	.07	.25	
Lives with family	.02	.15	
Employment	.64	.68	0 = 0 hours; 1 = 1-20 hours; 2 = over 20 hours
Grade point average	3.17	.66	0.0 to 4.0
Level	2.91	1.13	1 = freshman to 4 = senior
STEM major	.32	.47	0 = no; 1 = yes
Arts/humanities major	.18	.39	0 = no; 1 = yes
Social sciences major	.09	.29	0 = no; 1 = yes
Education major	.01	.12	0 = no; 1 = yes
Business major	.13	.34	0 = no; 1 = yes
Health major	.06	.24	0 = no; 1 = yes

Measures

In the SERU survey, students were asked to indicate the ways in which they had been involved in 13 different activities or organizations (e.g., service organization, government organization, varsity sports, etc.). For each organization, students could select "participant or member," "officer or leader," or "neither." For this analysis, we were primarily interested in students' involvement as officers or leaders, so we dummy-coded that category with participants and non-members as referents (Table 1). In predicting students' leadership participation, we controlled for the importance of leadership opportunities to students.

In the survey, students were asked to indicate their parents' educational attainment in one of nine possible categories (e.g., no formal education, high school degree, associate degree, etc.). We defined first-generation students as those whose parents have not earned a baccalaureate degree, and, in our analyses, we dummy-coded the variable with non-first-generation students as the referent category.

Students were also asked to indicate their family's household total annual combined income in 2011 by selecting from 11 options. We combined family income for both financially dependent and independent students. Family income variables were also recoded into fewer categories to ease interpretation of results. Soria and Barratt (2012) suggested that students are relatively reliable in self-reporting family income. When entering the categorical income variable into our logistic regression model, we used the highest income category (over $100,000) as our referent.

Gender and race were collected from the institutions participating in the study. Gender was dummy-coded (with males as the referent category) and racial and ethnic groups were dummy-coded with white students and students with other/unknown racial identification as referent categories.

Students were asked to indicate where they lived during the current semester by selecting one of eight categories (e.g., in a university residence hall, a fraternity or sorority, with family, etc.). We recoded this variable into four categories: on campus, with family, in a fraternity or sorority, or off campus. When entering the categorical income variable into our logistic regression model, we used the off campus category as our referent.

Students were also asked to indicate the number of hours they spent in employment in a typical week by choosing from one of eight categories (e.g., 0, 1-5 hours, 6-10 hours, etc.). We recoded this variable to narrow the categories. When entering the categorical employment variable into our logistic regression model, we used the lowest category (employed zero hours per week) as our referent.

We also controlled for students' grade point averages, which were institutionally derived, and their academic level (e.g., 1-30 credits = freshman, 31-60 credits = sophomore, etc.). Finally, students' academic majors were also provided by the participating institutions. We recoded those majors into several distinct categories (e.g., arts/humanities, STEM, etc.) and dummy coded each academic major separately with undeclared majors as the common referents.

Data Analysis

We used binary logistic regression analyses to predict students' involvement as a positional leader in at least one of thirteen student clubs or organizations. Logistic regression is appropriate for analyses that

have categorical dependent variables and either continuous or categorical independent variables (Field, 2009). We were primarily interested in examining the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics—students' first-generation status and their parental income—and their participation as positional leaders in student clubs or organizations. We controlled for the effects of demographic variables (e.g., gender and race/ethnicity), college experiences (e.g., residence, academic major, and employment), and the importance of leadership opportunities to students.

Results

The logistic regression model predicting students' participation in positional leadership had a pseudo R^2 value of .209 (Nagelkerke, 1991) and correctly classified 75.1% of the observed cases. A test of the full model against a constant only model was statistically significant, suggesting that there is a significant effect for the combined predictors on the outcome variable ($\chi^2 = 904.43$, $p < .001$, $df = 26$). The regression model (Table 2) suggests that family income and parental education are significant predictors of students' participation in positional leadership. Compared with students whose parents made over $100,000 per year, students whose parents made less than $19,999 per year were 1.39 times less likely to serve as positional leaders controlling for additional factors in our model. Students whose parents made between $20,000 and $49,999 were also 1.21 times less likely to serve as positional leaders than students whose parents made over $100,000 per year. Additionally, the model suggests that first-generation students are 1.35 times less likely to participate in leadership positions compared with non-first-generation students.

Compared to white students and other/unknown students, Asian American students were nearly 1.50 times more likely to serve as positional leaders in student organizations or clubs. A one-unit increase in grade point average was also associated with a 1.41 times increased likelihood of serving as a positional leader. Similarly, a one-unit increase in academic level (e.g., from freshmen to sophomore) was associated with a 1.46 times increased likelihood of serving as a leader. Students employed between one and 20 hours were 1.16 times more likely to serve as a leader compared with unemployed students while students employed over 20 hours were 1.39 times less likely to serve as a leader compared with unemployed students.

Students who lived with family were 2.11 times less likely to serve as leaders than students who lived off campus (who were likely upperclassmen living in apartments or housing near campus). Students who lived in fraternities or sororities were over six times more likely to serve as leaders than students who lived off campus. Finally, with every one-unit increase in the importance of leadership opportunities in college, students were 1.87 times more likely to have participated as a positional leader in a student club or organization.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Model Predicting Participation in Positional Leadership ($n = 5,752$)

Predictor	B	SE	e^{β} (odds ratio)	Sig.
Socioeconomic Characteristics				
Less than $19,999	-.329	.121	.720	**

$20,000 to $49,999	-.188	.102	.829	*
$50,000 to $79,999	-.114	.092	.807	
$80,000 to $99,999	-.073	.104	.930	
First-Generation	-.302	.087	.740	***
Demographics				
Female	-.128	.068	.880	
Hispanic	-.004	.126	.996	
American Indian or Native American	-.271	.333	.762	
Asian American	.404	.090	1.497	***
African American	.256	.165	1.292	
Pacific Islander	.307	.687	1.359	
Multiracial	.357	.268	1.430	
STEM Major	.187	.106	1.206	
Arts/Humanities Major	.222	.117	1.249	
Social Sciences Major	.088	.140	1.092	
Education Major	-.119	.316	.888	
Business Major	.232	.124	1.261	
Health Major	-.008	.158	.992	
Grade Point Average	.347	.040	1.414	***
Academic Level	.375	.062	1.455	***
Employed 1-20 Hours	.146	.070	1.157	*
Employed over 20 Hours	-.328	.120	.720	**
On Campus Housing	.108	.082	1.114	
Living with Family	-.748	.162	.473	***
Living in a Fraternity or Sorority	1.923	.191	6.843	***

Importance of Leadership	.624	.036	1.866	***
Constant	-6.328	.306	.002	***

Note. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Discussion and Implications

The results suggest that low-income and first-generation college students are less likely to participate in leadership positions compared with their peers who are from higher-income families or those who are not the first in their families to attend college. Leadership positions open a variety of doors for college students and it is particularly concerning that low-income and first-generation students may not be able to reap the many benefits that often accompany leadership positions. Leadership educators may wish to examine institutional policies or practices that serve as structural barriers prohibiting students from lower-income and first-generation backgrounds from full engagement in leadership experiences.

In the immediate term, students who do not participate in leadership may have fewer networking opportunities with their peers. This could be potentially detrimental to low-income and first-generation students, who stand to greatly benefit from the social capital derived from peers; as noted by Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004), the social capital gained by co-curricular involvement may be particularly useful way in which first-generation students can acquire cultural capital to help them succeed academically and intellectually. In fact, Pascarella and colleagues (2004) found that first-generation students derived greater outcome benefits from extracurricular involvement and peer interaction than other students, even though they were significantly less likely to be engaged in these activities in college.

Lower participation in leadership positions could also translate into students' post-graduation opportunities and experiences; for example, Hu and Wolniak (2010) found a significant and positive association between college students' social engagement and their early career earnings. Employers may seek students who have held leadership positions, as these students often acquire skills highly valued by employers, including analytical and problem-solving skills, the ability to work well in diverse teams, ethics and integrity, and creativity (Hart Research Associates, 2010).

Furthermore, curricular leadership opportunities may be limited to students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds due to their expense or duration—students from low-income backgrounds may view leadership trainings as too expensive or may be prevented from engagement in these trainings or workshops due to the necessity of employment to pay for tuition and college expenses (Walpole, 2003). Students may also view curricular opportunities such as leadership minor programs as unaffordable due to the extra expense of tuition for courses outside of their primary academic majors.

College leadership opportunities could also lead to graduate and professional school enrollment, as leadership can promote students' academic achievement, graduation, and post-graduation academic pursuits (Keup, 2011; Sacramento State University Office of Institutional Research, 2011). First-generation students are less likely to attend graduate school than students whose parents graduated from

college (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004); therefore, college leadership could leverage first-generation and low-income students' opportunities to enroll in graduate and professional schools. The many benefits of leadership participation are complex and highly nuanced; yet, these benefits may be lost to students who are unable to participate as positional leaders.

Limitations

One limitation of this study lies in a potential for bias due to non-response; in other words, we have only captured the leadership experiences of roughly one-third of the students at the participating institutions who responded to the survey. On top of that, our sample is reduced further for the randomly-assigned module. Students' were relied upon to state their own leadership experiences and it is possible their definitions of leadership might not equate (e.g., one who served as a treasurer in a student organization may not view that as a leadership role whereas another student with the same position might deem it to be a leadership role).

Furthermore, we have only examined students' positional leadership roles and we have not examined their perceptions of leadership, leadership identity, or leadership efficacy—all factors that are potentially more important in students' leadership development than their positions. Along those lines, we did not examine the types of leadership development students might have undertaken in the forms of workshops, trainings, formal coursework, or conferences—prior research has affirmed the importance of these experiences in students' leadership development (Rosch & Caza, 2012).

Finally, we have only researched students within the institutional context of large, public research universities. Although these colleges enroll many of the nation's undergraduates, student experiences at these types of institutions differ in many ways from other institutional contexts (e.g., small, private liberal arts colleges and universities; community colleges, etc.).

Recommendations

We recommend that future investigators examine the leadership participation rates of low-income and first-generation students on their own campuses to see if disparities exist. We also encourage future studies to examine why low-income and first-generation students may be less inclined to participation in positional leadership roles. Is this phenomenon due to a lack of time, as suggested by some researchers who found that low-income and first-generation students tend to be employed more hours (Walpole, 2003)? Or, is this perhaps the result of students' perceptions that they do not belong in leadership positions, a suggested by others (Barratt, 2012)? Investigations into personal and structural barriers prohibiting first-generation and low-income students from full and active participation in leadership positions are warranted given our previous findings.

Attaining a leadership position is an important investment for students' future endeavors. Suggestions have been made to further increase and restructure leadership education in colleges to help students become better leaders (Fincher & Shalka, 2009). Students can also start their leadership journeys early; for example, students can be encouraged to pursue leadership opportunities even in their first year of study. The importance of leadership participation is a message that can be shared with *all* students as they

first enter the university. There are vast opportunities that students encounter as they enter college; yet, many first-year students may perceive that leadership opportunities are reserved for upperclassmen. Many students who delay leadership involvement until their junior and senior years may find themselves too overwhelmed with the competing pressures of academics, internships, and employment to juggle additional leadership responsibilities; consequently, these upperclassmen may not participate in leadership positions due to these additional responsibilities.

Due to their limited social and cultural capital, first-generation and low-income college students may not perceive the direct and indirect benefits of leadership participation. To attract first-generation and low-income students into leadership positions, one strategy can include offering remuneration for those who may not participate in leadership due to other employment obligations. Paid positional leadership positions, which can include stipends, scholarships, internships, and work study, can assist students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to build social capital while at the same time creating a source of income. Leadership development can also be enhanced among those students who are already in work study or employment positions on campus. DeBard (2004) noted that newer generations of college students (known as millennials) have become accustomed to rewards for service in high school and that this anticipation often carries over to college. While a financial reward system for leadership can be problematic in many ways, it can also afford students opportunities to engage in leadership amid their personal financial limitations.

Many universities have programs that address the needs of low-income and first-generation students while also giving students incentives to become more involved in and around their university communities; for example, TRiO programs, which include Student Support Services (SSS) in colleges and universities across the nation, provide educational outreach tailored to support students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds (Thomas, Farrow, & Martinez, 1998). Within such programs, the specific population of low-income and first-generation students can be encouraged to seek positional leadership opportunities across campus and participate as leaders within SSS peer mentorship and tutoring services. TRiO staff can play powerful roles as mentors, coaches, and guides to encourage first-generation and low-income students to participate in leadership (Owens, 2010). TRiO scholarships and related funding opportunities could be used to encourage students to participate in positional leadership opportunities rather than spending time in employment.

Universities can also establish community-based programs or initiatives for first-generation and low-income students. At the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, the Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence (MCAE) provides undergraduate students the chance to become leaders in their university community through the MCAE Ambassadors and Multicultural Civic Engagement (MCE) programs (Office for Equity and Diversity). Student ambassadors, who mentor first-year students in their transition to the University, receive stipends every semester of engagement. Students who participate in the MCE program complete 20 hours of community service, hold three academic appointments with advisors, and receive a scholarship for their participation. Students in both programs receive leadership development training, hold leadership positions within MCAE, and are provided valuable opportunities to engage with their fellow peers in MCAE (Office for Equity and Diversity, 2012). The stipend program offered through MCAE can offset the necessity of employment for low-income students and encourage students to spend more of their time on campus related to leadership development.

Finally, the entire campus community can cultivate a welcoming atmosphere for low-income and first-generation students to support their engagement. Prior research has affirmed the importance of community in student engagement: students, especially those from historically underrepresented or marginalized backgrounds, are most engaged in colleges where supportive environments, collaborative learning, and faculty interactions allow them to navigate academic and social challenges of campus life (Jehangir, 2010; Kuh, 2008). Along those lines, faculty and student affairs practitioners can work in tandem to encourage low-income and first-generation students to undertake positional leadership challenges (Jehangir, 2010; Kinzie & Kuh, 2004; Nash, 2009).

Conclusion

The results of our study suggest that low-income and first-generation college students do not participate in positional leadership as often as their peers from higher-income and college-educated families. We encourage leadership educators to examine whether personal or structural barriers limit first-generation and low-income students' active participation in positional leadership—but we also believe it is important to extend these examinations to curricular leadership opportunities as well. Positional leadership can open a variety of doors for all college students and may prove especially important among low-income and first-generation students. While there are many ways in which universities can encourage first-generation and low-income students to participate in positional leadership positions, we advocate for a campus community-wide approach to create a supportive campus environment for low-income and first-generation students.

References

Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W., & Oseguera, L. (2004). The declining "equity" of American higher education. *Review of Higher Education, 27*(3), 321-341.

Barratt, W. (2012). Social class and the extracurriclum. *Journal of College and Character, 13*(3), 1-7.

Billison, J., & Terry, B. (1982). In search of the silken purse: Factors in attrition among first-generation students. *College and University, 58,* 57-75.

Cabrera, A. F., Burkum, K. R., & La Nasa, S. M. (2005). Pathways to a four-year degree: Determinants of transfer and degree completion. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: A formula for student success.* Westport, CT: ACE/Praeger.

Choy, S. (2001). *Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment*. (NCES Rep. No. 2001-126). Washington, D. C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

Clauss-Ehlers, C. S., & Wibrowski, C. R. (2007). Building educational resilience and social support: The effects of the educational opportunity fund program among first- and second-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(5), 574–584.

Cooper, D. L., Healy, M. A., & Simpson, J. (1994). Student development through involvement: Specific changes over time. *Journal of College Student Development, 35*, 98-102.

Cress, C. M., Astin, H. S., Zimmerman-Oster, K., & Burkhardt, J. C. (2001). Developmental outcomes of college students' involvement in leadership activities. *Journal of College Student Development, 42*(1), 15-27.

Debard, R. (2004). Millennials coming to college. *New Directions for Student Services, 106,* 33-45.

Dugan, J. P., & Komives, S. R. (2010). Influences on college students' capacity for socially responsible leadership. *Journal of College Student Development, 51*, 525- 549.

Engle, J., & O'Brien, C. (2007). *Demography is not destiny: Increasing the graduation rates of low-income college students at large public universities*. Washington, DC:

The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

Fincher, J., & Shalka, T. R. (2009). Co-curricular leadership education: Considering critical questions. *Journal of Leadership Education, 8*(1), 228-237.

Hall, S. L., Scott, F., & Borsz, M. (2008). A constructivist case study examining the leadership of undergraduate students in campus recreational sports. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(2), 125-140.

Hart Research Associates. (2012). *Raising the bar: Employers' views on college learning in the wake of the economic downturn*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Hu, S., & Wolniak, G. C. (2010). Initial evidence on the influence of college student engagement on early career earnings. *Research in Higher Education, 51,* 750-766.

Jehangir, R. R. (2010). *Higher education and first-generation students: Cultivating community, voice, and place for the new majority.* New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Kezar, A. J., & Moriarty, D. (2000). Expanding our understanding of student leadership development: A study exploring gender and ethnic identity. *Journal of College Student Development, 41*(1), 55-69.

Keup, J. R. (2011, March). *Exploring the impact of peer leadership experiences   on academic development.* Presented at the ACPA Annual Convention, Baltimore, MD.

Kinzie, J., & Kuh, G. D. (2004). Going deep: Learning from campuses that share responsibility for student success. *About Campus, 9*(5), 2-8.

Komives, S. R., Lucas, N., & McMahon, T. R. (1998). *Exploring leadership: For college students who want to make a difference*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Komives, S. R., Owen, J. O., Longerbeam, S., Mainella, F. C., & Osteen, L. (2005). Developing a leadership identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*, 593-611.

Kuh, G.D. (1995). The other curriculum: Out-of-class experiences associated with student learning and personal development. *Journal of Higher Education*, *66*, 123-155.

Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Kuh, G. D., & Lund, J. P. (1994). What students gain from participating in student government. *New Directions for Student Services, 66*, 5-17.

Logue, C. T., Hutchens, T. A., & Hector, M. A. (2005). Student leadership: A phenomenological exploration of postsecondary experiences. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(4)*, 393-408.

McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Moschetti, R., & Hudley, C. (2008). Measuring social capital among first-generation and non-first-generation, working-class, White males. *Journal of College Admission*, (198), 25–30.

Nagelkerke, N. J. D. (1991). A note on the general definition of the coefficient of determination. *Biometrika, 78,* 691-692.

Nash, R. J. (2009). Crossover pedagogy: The collaborative search for meaning. *About Campus, 14*(1), 2-9.

Office for Equity and Diversity. (2010). University of Minnesota Twin-Cities Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence. Retrieved from https://diversity.umn.edu/multicultural/.

Owens, M. A. (2010). Administrators' descriptions of their leadership roles in a   precollege program. *Journal of Leadership Education, 9*(1), 105-121.

Parks, S. D. (2000). *Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning, purpose, and faith.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First- generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education, 75*(3), 249-284.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: Vol. 2. A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Rosch, D. M., & Caza, A. (2012). The durable effects of short-term programs on student leadership development. *Journal of Leadership Education, 11*(1), 28-49.

Sacramento State University Office of Institutional Research. (2011). *Student leadership and academic performance: A study of student club leaders*.Retrieved from http://www.csus.edu/oir/Assessment/Non-academic%20Program%20Assessment/Student%20Ac

Schueler, L A., Hoffman, J. A., & Peterson, E. (2009). Fostering safe, engaging campuses for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students. In S. R. Harper & S. J. Quaye, *Student engagement in higher education* (pp. 61-69). New York, NY: Routledge.

Schuh, J. H., & Laverty, M. (1983). The perceived long-term influence of holding a significant student leadership position. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 24,* 28-32.

Schwartz, H. L. (1991). An interview study of former student leaders' perceptions of an ethical conflict involving the college or university president. *Journal of College Student Development, 32,* 447-454.

Soria, K. M., & Barratt, W. (2012, June). *Examining class in the classroom: Utilizing social class data in institutional and academic research.* Association for Institutional Research Forum, New Orleans, LA.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D., & Dornbusch, S. M. (1995). Social capital and the reproduction of inequality: Information networks among Mexican-origin high school students. *Sociology of Education, 68,* 116-135.

Stuber, J. (2011). *Inside the college gates: How class and culture matter in higher education.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Thomas, E. P., Farrow, E. V., & Martinez, J. (1998). A TRIO program's impact   on participant graduation rates: The Rutgers University Student Support Services program and its network of services. *The Journal of Negro   Education, 67*(4), 389-403.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention. What's next? *Journal of College Student Retention, 8*(1), 1-19.

Walpole, M. (2003). Socioeconomic status and college: How SES affects college experiences and outcomes. *The Review of Higher Education, 27*, 45-73.

Walpole, M. (2007). Economically and educationally challenged students in higher education: Access to outcomes. *ASHE Higher Education Report, 33*(3). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

York-Anderson, D., & Bowman, S. (1991). Assessing the college knowledge of first-generation and second-generation students. *Journal of College Student Development, 32*, 116-122.