"I didn't just want a degree": Students' perceptions about benefits from participation in student leadership programmes

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Abstract

Increasingly, universities are involved in providing leadership development opportunities that support students' academic endeavours and their personal and professional development, including employability and citizenship skills. Leadership experiences are beneficial not only for students, but also for universities, the wider community, and future employers. To develop a greater understanding of students' perceived benefits of their involvement in peer leadership activities, a group of Australasian universities participated in a pilot survey based on the United States *National Survey of Peer Leadership*. Overall, the results suggest students believe they benefit from peer leadership experiences across a range of key outcomes areas, most prominently creative problem solving, appreciation of diversity, and a sense of belonging and contributing to the university community.

Introduction

Research around students' co- and extra-curricular involvement suggest this is an increasingly important part of the student experience at university, as well as preparation for their life beyond university (Kuh, 2003). Students become involved in such activities alongside their studies, to support both personal and professional development and ultimately work-readiness and broader skills of civic engagement (Coates, 2010; Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, & Gonyea, 2006). Arvanitakis argues universities need to focus on fostering a broad range of skills sets in the development of curricular and extra-curricular programmes to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016). Further, many of the areas of students' leadership involvement in higher education incorporate some aspect of peer leadership, for example, through activities such as peer mentoring, peer tutoring, residential advising, and student representation in clubs and societies.

Peer leadership or student leadership has been conceptualised in various ways over time. The conceptual view of peer leadership in this paper aligns with that of some key writers in the field of student and peer leadership (Dugan, 2006a, 2006b; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Dugan, a key scholar involved in peer leadership development programmes in the United States of America (hereafter, US), emphasises the paradigm shift that has occurred from a view of leadership as positional (for example president of a student union), to one that emphasises a more process-oriented collaborative interpersonal relationship based on shared goals (Dugan, 2006a). This paradigm shift resulted largely from research that suggests it is not inherent characteristics that make a good student leader but training and development (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). As opposed to older notions of leadership as 'positional' or as an inherent characteristic of students, it is now considered that all students who involve themselves in leadership have the potential to increase their skills and knowledge (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996; Komives, 2006; Komives et al., 2005; Wren, 1995).

Many university-based peer leadership programmes involve more senior students supporting or connecting with junior peers. These type of leadership-related programs have proliferated in the higher education sector since the mid-1980s (Cress et al., 2001), most notably in the US. An example of a peer leadership programme that has been implemented in many universities, especially in English-speaking countries, is the Peer Assisted Study Sessions programme, PASS (known in the United States as Supplemental Instruction or SI), aimed at supporting students' academic success and other outcomes. Much of the research into this programme confirms the effectiveness of peer leadership in achieving the primary aim of the programme in terms of academic outcomes (Dawson, van der Meer, Skalicky, & Cowley, 2014).

Experience and benefits of involvement. The benefits of student involvement in extra-curricular and leadership programmes can be many (e.g., Shook & Keup, 2012). Moreover, they can benefit students, their universities and the communities, future employers and organisations that students are or will be involved in both during their studies as well as in their future careers.

There is an abundance of programs that could be deemed 'instrumental', that is preparing leaders for the workplace in particular professions, such as engineering (e.g., Athreya & Kalkoff, 2010; Ellis & Petersen, 2011; Simpson, Evans, & Reeve, 2012), cost accounting (e.g., Bloch, Brewer, & Stout, 2012), sport and recreation (e.g., Tingle, Cooney, Asbury, & Tate, 2013), entrepreneurship (e.g., Bagheri & Lope Pihie, 2013), and nursing and clinical leadership (e.g., Leigh, Rutherford, Wild, Cappleman, & Hynes, 2012; Middleton, 2013; O'Driscoll, Allan, & Smith, 2010). It could also be argued that programmes that may not necessarily be directly aimed at preparing students for employability (Araujo, 2015; Kinash, Crane, Judd, & Knight, 2016) after completion of their degree, may still have an instrumental value for students. For example, students may consider that the skills they are likely to develop to be worthwhile for their future, or that by including evidence of leadership involvement in their job applications, their profile when applying for jobs might be strengthened.

Other programmes could be characterised as more 'altruistic' and not directly aimed at deriving a benefit other than personal satisfaction. These may include initiatives that have a community-facing, social service focus such as anti-drug youth leadership programs (see for example, Mortensen et al., 2014), or 'hybrid' leadership development

programs that integrate curricular/in-classroom activities with extra-curricular/out-of-classroom activities that usually involve collaborations between external stakeholder groups and universities to address issues of common concern, such as sustainable development (e.g., Stough, Lambrechts, Ceulemans, & Rothe, 2013). Many universities also have programmes that enable students to provide peer learning or mentoring support for more junior students. Although some of these positions may be paid, it is conceivable that student leaders' reasons for involvement may extend beyond the instrumental value and be more aimed at a desire to help others.

The value of students' involvement in extra and co-curricular programs in universities has been recognised as contributing to student learning outcomes, participation and engagement with the institution, and retention rates (Buckner & Williams, 1995; Cress et al., 2001; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research on student engagement in particular shows the beneficial effect of academically-related extra-curricular activities, including student leadership programmes (Krause & Coates, 2008). Furthermore, considering the financial constraints that many universities are operating under, it could be argued that the involvement of more senior students in positions of support to junior students in a range of peer learning and mentoring programmes could be financially advantageous in addition to the benefits for student retention, learning and engagement. With increasing student/staff ratios, student leadership programmes could mitigate financial constraints and provide a strong value proposition for institutions. In a similar vein, increased interaction between students by means of student leadership programmes, has an intrinsic value in and of itself. Interaction, and ideally greater connectedness between students, are also known to be protective factors for mental health (Lipson, Gaddis, Heinze, Beck, & Eisenberg, 2015) which is an area of increasing concern and attention for higher education institutions.

The concept of "life-wide learning" proposed by Jackson (2010) seeks to encapsulate the benefits of the wide range of students' formal and informal learning experiences during their time in higher education, including volunteering, mentoring and other leadership-related activities. The challenge, he says, is for higher education to value and support development of such learning.

Purposeful development of students' work-ready and employability skills through intentionally designed programs is a recent trend in higher education. As a consequence, both curricular and co-curricular peer learning and mentoring programs have proliferated on many Australasian university campuses. For example, programs such as Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) have been incorporated into many University strategic learning and teaching priorities due to their contributions to achieving goals in student learning, student engagement and the development of future leaders (Dawson et al., 2014).

There is also an increasing trend to purposefully encourage students to explicitly reflect upon and evidence the accrued benefits of involvement in such programs; and PASS in Australasia is one example of a program where this reflection and evidencing is being incorporated into the training and ongoing professional development of the peer leaders. Fuglsang et al. (2018), in their chapter on employing students in higher education, highlight both the need for, and benefit of, incorporating such purposeful reflection and evidencing of students' learnings and broader skill and capability development through their co-curricular on-campus employment opportunities.

In doing so, students may develop a greater appreciation that universities do contribute to their broader employability skills, beyond the attainment of their degree qualification that is, in most degrees, typically more focused on content and disciplinary knowledge. As Arvanitakis and Hornby (2016) argue, the development of citizenship scholarship is the great challenge that universities must meet in order to remain relevant and not redundant in the twenty-first century.

Collecting evidence of the benefits of extra-curricular involvement. In order for universities to be able to more rigorously assess the benefits of students' involvement in extra- and co-curricular programs, universities should encourage program coordinators to systematically collect relevant and reliable data related to, for example, students' experiences, effectiveness and perceived benefits of involvement. The US-based National Resource Center For The First-Year Experience and Students In Transition (NRC) has taken the lead in the US to investigate student-perceived benefits of engagement in peer leadership opportunities through their *National Survey of Peer Leadership* (Shook & Keup, 2012; Skipper & Keup, 2017; Young & Hopp, 2013). One of the foci of the survey is to seek peer leaders' perceptions of gains in a range of areas grouped into four key outcomes: skills development, undergraduate experiences, employability and academic performance. Data from the survey, administered originally in 2009 (Keup, 2012; Shook & Keup 2012; Skipper & Keup, 2017) and again in 2013 (Keup, 2014; Young & Hopp, 2013), revealed that overwhelmingly students hold very positive views about their involvement as peer leaders. Across both survey administrations, the vast majority of students responded that their responsibilities as peer leaders enhanced their undergraduate experience, in particular, their knowledge of campus resources; their meaningful interactions with faculty, staff and other students; their feeling of belonging to the institution and desire to persist in their studies; and their understanding of and interactions with diverse people. In addition, they reported positive change across a range of skill development areas (e.g., leadership, interpersonal communication, time and project management, critical thinking, written communication, and academic skills) and other employability outcomes (e.g., innovative and creative problem solving, collaboration, collating and applying information from different sources, and ethical decision making). Somewhat surprising was the finding that a high proportion of students rated academic performance outcomes as the area that gained least from their peer leadership experiences, despite many of the respondents having held academic support peer-leader roles. Shook & Keup (2012) and Skipper & Keup (2017) suggest that peer leadership gains are rated lower in cases where there is an over-involvement in peer leadership activities, where there is significant time needed to undertake peer leadership responsibilities, and where there is stress associated with the peer leader role.

This level of broad nation-wide data collection does not currently occur in the Australasian context. Surveys such as the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE; Coates, 2010; Hagel, Carr & Devlin, 2012) and the University Experience Survey (UES; Radloff, Coates, Krause, 2011) do not provide specific enough data to inform the development of specific peer leadership programs. In fact, outside of the US, there has been little empirical research on student leadership program quality and how program activities can contribute to leadership development and learning.

The current research is part of an international project that arose from discussions between Australasian researchers and the NRC to develop a deeper understanding of the development and experiences of peer leaders across different national contexts, and to

draw comparisons to inform best practice around peer leadership. The international project involves collaboration across higher education institutions in five countries: Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and South Africa. A cross-cultural comparison of the data across all of the partner countries is currently underway and will examine how peer leadership experiences differ across countries and the ways in which social/cultural factors may influence the peer leadership experiences of students. The focus of this paper is on the Australasian context (including both Australia and New Zealand), and uses an adapted version of the NRC National Survey of Peer Leadership, the International Survey of Peer Leadership (ISPL), to explore Australian and New Zealand students' perceptions of the benefits of being involved in extra- or co-curricular peer leadership roles. This then might inform our understanding of how these perceived benefits align with the benefits for universities and the community at large. A recent publication by Frade and Tiroyabone (2017) reported on the ISPL results of the South African higher education sector.

Methodology

The US National Survey of Peer Leadership, is an online survey containing items relating to: student demographics, students' experiences with peer leadership, characteristics of peer leadership roles and programs, self-rated gains relating to peer leader experiences and several open-ended items. This Survey formed the basis of the ISPL, which was contextualized for each of the participating countries to reflect local terminology and demographic characteristics.

The Australasian version of the ISPL comprised 10 demographic items (e.g., sex, age, discipline area of study), 18 items about the peer leader roles of participants (e.g., type of roles and duration, training, compensation) and two items relating to participants' motivation for taking on peer leadership roles and satisfaction with their peer leadership experiences. Most of these items had multiple-choice response options, while one item about motivation was open-ended. In addition, the survey contained 38 items relating to participants' perceptions of the effects of their peer leadership experiences on skills development, institutional engagement, employability outcomes and academic performance. Note, six of these items were new and were not included in the original NSPL. Participants were asked to respond as to the degree to which they perceived that a range of skills, abilities and other experiences changed (increased or decreased) as a result of their participation in peer leadership programmes. There were seven response categories, ranging from "greatly decreased" to "greatly increased".

The survey was administered online at five universities (four Australian universities and one from New Zealand) in October-November 2014. As this was a pilot study and because of the point in time in the academic year, a convenience sample approach was taken by sending email invitations to all undergraduate students who had participated in a number of selected student programmes at each of the participating institutions. In these programmes, student leaders had a clearly identifiable role of facilitation or guidance with regards to the groups of students they were involved with. For this pilot study, no attempt was made to collect a representative sample in the institutions of the full range of existing peer leadership programmes across the institutions.

Findings

The Australasian administration of the ISPL returned 239 surveys. Participants from Australian universities made up 85% of total participants with 15% from the New Zealand university. The majority of participants were female (63%) and between the ages of 18 and 25 years (72%). Most participants (65%) at the time of responding held one peer-leader position, 23% held two positions, and the remainder held three or more positions. Over the course of their entire university experience, 68% of participants had held one or two peer leader positions, while 13% had held a total of five or more positions. Approximately half of the participants (n=115) had engaged in leadership roles associated with the PASS/SI programmes which most likely reflects the particular involvement of researchers in the Australasian project group with the PASS programmes in their institutions. Other peer leadership roles included academic support positions such as peer advisor, peer mentor and lab assistant (n = 98), and positions in transition support services (n = 71), campus life (n = 67), outreach (n = 37), community services (n = 27), student residences (n = 24) and study abroad (n = 8).

The vast majority of participants (83%) engaged in peer leader responsibilities for an average of 10 hours or less per week, with almost 50% of students spending a maximum of 5 hours per week in peer leader roles. Most students (69%) received financial compensation for at least one of their peer leader roles, while 37% of students worked within a volunteer capacity, noting that some students undertaking more than one role may have been paid for one role and volunteering in another. Training was an important component of the Australasian peer leader experience, with 90% of participants undertaking some initial training (1/2 to 2 days) and 69% engaging in ongoing formal training (after initial training) via workshops (69%), meetings with their supervisors (56%), staff meetings (43%) and peer leader retreats (19%).

Most participants were very positive about their overall peer leadership experiences, with 91% indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied in their roles and 89% responding that they would recommend being a peer leader to other students. Similarly, when asked to rate changes they experienced (from greatly decreased to greatly increased) as a result of their involvement as peer leaders, the majority of participants responded positively across all four outcome areas: skills development, undergraduate experiences, employability and academic performance.

Table 1 presents the percentage of students who reported that their peer leader experiences had a positive effect (increased or greatly increased) on them in terms of the four outcome areas. The table also includes mean survey item scores (and standard deviations), calculated by assigning numerical values to the response categories: greatly decreased (score = 1) to greatly increased (score = 7). A value of 4 corresponds to the midpoint category of 'no change' and mean scores above this value indicate positive change. Both summary statistics were calculated and reported here so as to compare directly the current results with those of previous studies which have reported the survey findings as either frequency data (Shook & Keup, 2012; Keup, 2014; Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017) or average scores (e.g. Young & Hopp. 2013).

All items in the survey attained a mean score of greater than 4.0 indicating that, on average, the effects of their peer leadership experiences were perceived by participants as resulting in positive change across all items. The top perceived benefit

for this cohort of students was that participating in peer leadership increased their sense of contributing to their campus community. Some 85% of participants responded to this item as having increased or greatly increased as a direct result of their peer leadership experiences, with an additional 14% responding that it increased slightly. Other areas that many students perceived to have increased included: leadership and interpersonal communication skills, having meaningful interpersonal interactions, particularly with student peers, adaptability, their knowledge about available resources on campus and their a sense of belonging at their institution. In addition, most items relating to the undergraduate experience and to employability skills were considered by more than 50% of participants to have increased as a result of their peer leadership experiences. Building professional relationships at work was the employability skill that students identified as having benefited most from their peer leadership.

Table 1. *Percentage of students indicating item area increased as a result of leadership participation, together with ISPL item mean score and standard deviation* (*n* = 239)

Outcome / Item area	% Students	*Mean*	*SD*
Skills Development			
Leadership	81.5	6.28	0.86
Interpersonal communication	77.7	6.13	0.91
Adaptability	75.5	6.04	0.97
Teamwork	66.8	5.82	1.09
Organisation	62.3	5.77	1.02
Time management	59.9	5.76	1.06
Presentation	59.8	5.64	1.14
Decision making	59.2	5.67	1.06
Creativity	58.9	5.66	1.04
Project management	56.7	5.66	1.11
Problem solving	53.6	5.57	1.02
Critical thinking	52.8	5.61	1.00
Written communication	48.7	5.37	1.05
Undergraduate Experience			
Feeling of contributing to campus community	84.9	6.38	0.77
Knowledge of campus resources	73.3	6.04	0.93
Feeling of belonging at institution	70.8	5.94	1.04
Meaningful interaction with peers	70.6	5.99	0.86
Interaction with people from different backgrounds	60.9	5.76	1.05
Knowledge of people with different backgrounds	57.3	5.71	10.6
Understanding people from different backgrounds	56.7	5.68	1.07
Meaningful interaction with staff members	56.3	5.64	1.01
Meaningful interaction with faculty members	53.5	5.54	1.07
Desire to stay at institution and graduate	54.6	5.53	1.28
Desire to engage in continuous learning	53.4	5.52	1.21
Employability Skills			
Building professional relationships at work	69.5	5.91	0.95
Providing direction through persuasion	66.8	5.80	0.97
Creating innovative approaches to a task	66.4	5.79	0.96
Bringing together info from different places	61.9	5.78	0.96
Analyzing a problem from a new perspective	59.8	5.67	0.90
Applying knowledge to real-word setting	54.7	5.61	1.07
Expectations for success in a FT job after graduation	50.9	5.46	1.17
Engaging in ethical decision-making	45.8	5.34	1.10
Sharing ideas with others in writing	43.5	5.30	1.00
Academic Performance			
Academic skills development	43.3	5.16	1.13
Overall academic performance	15.2	4.38	1.04
Grade point average	11.7	4.23	1.05
Number of completed subjects, units each term	6.0	4.11	0.75
Facilitate timely graduation	5.4	4.13	0.70

Least beneficial (although still positively rated by a many students) was the perceived impact of peer leadership on their academic skills and academic performance. Across all items in the academic outcome category, the majority of students responded that their peer leadership experiences resulted in no change or only a slight increase. In addition, a noteworthy number of students indicated that their GPA (17%) or overall academic performance (13%) had been negatively affected by their experiences.

To understand more fully the survey responses in relation to the perceived benefits of peer leadership, a principal component analysis (PCA) was undertaken to explore whether the number of item responses reduced to a smaller number of more meaningful components. Note, no psychometric evaluations of the original NRC National Survey of Peer Leadership survey or the more recent International Survey of Peer Leaders (e.g., Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017) have been reported in the literature to date. The survey items in the original NRC National survey were developed based upon the literature on peer leadership. These items were grouped into four key outcome categories: skill development, undergraduate experience, employability and academic performance. The PCA was a method we used to examine how well the underlying structure of the ISPL fit with these outcome categories.

Initial data screening indicated that the data set met key assumptions of the PCA. Principal component analysis with *Varimax* rotation yielded an eight-component solution (eigenvalues > 1.0) which accounted for 71.2% of the observed variance. As the resulting correlation matrix revealed some moderate to strong correlations (>.3) between the extracted components, a second PCA was undertaken, using oblique (*Oblimin*) rotation. The resulting pattern matrix revealed reasonably similar structure to that for the orthogonal rotation. As an exploratory study, and for the sake of simplicity (see, for example, Kim and Mueller, 1978), the results of the PCA with *Varimax* rotation are reported here.

Table 2 presents summary statistics for the PCA derived components together with the number and mean score of survey items that loaded on each component, the percent variance accounted for by the component, and the reliability coefficient. Satisfactory internal reliability was reached for all components (Cronbach's $\alpha > .70$). Note, three survey items that loaded on one or more components but had low communalities and did not appear to fit conceptually with other component items were eliminated from this part of the analyses.

Table 2. *Rotated (Varimax) component descriptors and summary statistics*

Component	Number of items	% of variance	Cronbach alpha	Component mean
1. Creative problem solving	12	19.47	.93	5.7
2. Appreciation of diversity	3	10.05	.95	5.7
3. Belonging and contributing	4	9.55	.84	5.8
4. Management and planning	5	8.95	.89	5.8
5. Interpersonal interaction	4	6.54	.80	5.7
6. Academic performance	3	6.27	.81	4.6
7. Academic progression	2	5.21	.71	4.1
8. Written communication	2	5.17	.76	5.3

The first component, which accounted for 19.5% of the variance, was labelled *creative problem solving* due to the high loadings of survey items that related to problem-solving skills (e.g., critical thinking skills, decision making skills, creativity, adaptability) and innovative or creative problem-solving processes (e.g., analysing a problem from a new perspective, bringing together information learned from different places, creating innovative approaches to complete a task). The other components (and % of total variance) were labelled:

- A*ppreciation of diversity* (10.1%) - knowledge and understanding of, and interaction with, people from different backgrounds;
- *Belonging and contributing* (9.6%) - a sense of belonging and contributing to the institution and campus community;
- *Management and planning* (9.0%) - a set of capabilities related to organisational skills, time and project management and leadership skills;
- *Interpersonal relationships* (6.5%) - meaningful interactions with peers, academic and other institutional staff;
- *Academic performance* (6.3%) - overall academic performance and outcomes;
- *Academic progress* (5.2%) - completion of subjects or courses and expectation of graduation;
- *Written communication* (5.1%) - writing competency and ability to share ideas with others through written communications.
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Overall, peer leadership experiences were considered to have changed most positively respondents' management and planning skills, sense of belonging and contributing to their educational institution, creative problem-solving abilities and their appreciation of diversity. Academic performance and progression were perceived to have benefitted least from students' engagement in peer leadership roles, although these were still rated positively (>4.0).

Analyses of variance were performed and effect sizes calculated to assess differences in mean scores for each of the components across several participant demographic characteristics. No significant or meaningful differences were found for gender across any of the components. For the component "academic performance", there was a significant difference (F=4.2, p<.05) between respondents who were involved as leaders in a PASS/SI programme and those who were not, with the PASS/SI leaders rating academic performance higher (Mean=4.68) than those in other leader roles (Mean=4.42), however, the effect size was relatively small, d=0.3.

For all components, except "academic performance" and "academic progression", there were significant differences between students who had held one leadership position and those who had held more than one position. Analyses of variance indicated that the latter groups rated the perceived benefits of these components significantly higher (p<.005) than participants who had held only one leadership position. Bonferoni post-hoc analyses revealed that the main differences were between those who held one position, and those who held or had held in the past three or more leadership positions. The effect sizes ranged from d=0.43 to d=.82, with the largest differences being for the "creative problem solving" and "management and planning" components (d=0.82 for both).

One of the items in the survey asked respondents what motivated them to become a leader? This free-text question was completed by 220 respondents, some providing

more than one reason why they participated as leaders. Following a general inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006), five main themes emerged. As can be seen in table 3, 60% of all respondents were motivated by a desire to help other students or to give back to the university.

Only 20% of respondents mentioned they were motivated by more instrumental outcomes, such as the value of an enhanced CV, or being paid for the position. However, it could be argued that personal or professional development could also be considered instrumental motivation, as students derive a benefit from their involvement. Many students provided more than one motivation. For example, of the 134 respondents who indicated altruism-type motives, 44 also indicated other reasons. Table 4 shows illustrative examples of responses in each category, including responses with more than one motivation.

Table 3. *Motivation for students' involvement in peer leadership roles* (n = 220)

Motivation Category	Responses (*n*)	Percent of respondents
Altruism – giving back, helping	134	60%
Instrumental – CV, money	45	20%
Developmental – personal/professional learning	55	25%
Drawing on existing skills	12	5%
For the experience or to be involved	29	13%
Other	25	11%

Discussion

Overall, the findings suggest that participation in peer leadership programmes resulted in a range of gains for the student participants. This echoes the findings from both the US National survey (Shook & Keup, 2012; Young & Hopp, 2013; Skipper & Keup, 2017) and South African context of the ISPL (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017). In the Australasian sample, the highest reported gains were with regards to a sense of contribution to the university community, leadership skills and interpersonal communication. The US studies reported the highest gains for leadership, knowledge of campus resources, and interpersonal communication (Keup, 2014; Young & Hopp, 2013), while in the South African study, the highest reported gains were for meaningful interaction with peers, understanding people from different backgrounds and building professional interpersonal relationships (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017). Note however, caution is required when drawing direct comparisons across the International and original

Table 4. *Illustrative examples of students' motivation for involvement in peer leadership*

Motivation	Illustrative examples
Altruistic reasons	I wanted to help people learn and improve their first year experience. I had been a student in these programs and wanted to give back due to the positive experience I had. I am also very passionate about educational disadvantage and higher education. PASS helped me with subject's I struggled with and I wanted to take part in providing the same help to first year students. I felt that I had successfully navigated through my own first year at university and wanted to assist others in that transition to aid them to adjust comfortably and perform successfully. Wanting to help first year student academically socially etc. as I didn't have this kind of support as a first-year student. Idea of giving back to the community and helping out fellow students.
Instrumental reasons	I enjoy helping others and thought it was a great way to earn money while giving back to my University and peers. Able to work around my studies, helped cement my own studies. I enjoy helping other and finance. I thought it looked like a good resume builder that I could easily fit into my timetable. Furthermore I was excited about the possibility of improving my public speaking and also communication skills. I feel I had been a successful tutor in the past. It also supplemented my income in a flexible manner.
Personal development	I wanted to do more at uni. I didn't just want to get a degree. I wanted to gain other skills as well. Personal development, chance to get experience and learn new skills. Personal and professional development, meet new people, learn new skills, develop interpersonal skills, help others, promote leadership, further myself, grow part of a community. I thought it would be a good way to gain confidence, help others, enhance my CV as well as an overall educating experience.
Utilising skills	I had attended the programme myself and felt I had what it took to be a facilitator. Also enjoy helping others and sharing my knowledge. I reckon it is part of my personality. I am a mature aged student and the role just naturally fell to me being amongst the oldest of the leadership program.
Gathering experiences	Making friends, having fun, developing myself, helping others and contributing values to my community. Experience, looks good on my CV (in that order). I wanted to be more involved in my community.

US National survey findings as additional items were added to the ISPL. For example, the highest rated Australasian item was not included in the 2013 administration of the NSPL.

The findings regarding the lesser perceived benefits related to academic performance are not entirely surprising, given the competing demands of peer leadership roles and students' academic studies (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017; Skipper & Keup, 2017). This finding was similar to both the US and South African results. In the Australasian context, an exception to the general pattern of the impact of peer leadership on academic performance were participants in PASS/SI roles who rated the benefits on academic performance higher than participants in all other roles. Students who are recruited into leader positions in academically-focussed peer learning programmes (such as PASS/SI) are typically academically high performing students and the work they undertake in their peer role is of an academic nature. They may, therefore, have a greater awareness of the impact of, or experience greater gains from, their peer leadership experiences.

The findings regarding higher perceived outcomes being reported by students who held more than one leadership position, specifically three or more positions, is one that would benefit from further research; both to unpack the impact of a range of roles on the development of capabilities as well as length of time in a leadership role. Earlier research by Skalicky and Caney (2010) that considered the leadership pathway afforded by participation in their institution's PASS program, found students who moved to more senior leadership roles within the program reported growth in certain leadership capabilities. These capabilities became more oriented towards building relationships and team outcomes.

The items that target benefits of peer leadership participation in the NSPL and ISPL were grouped into four outcome areas. It is these four groupings - skills development, institutional experience, employability outcomes and academic performance - that have formed the conceptualization of peer leader benefits in previous literature relating to the US and South African contexts. The PCA conducted in this study provided an opportunity to examine in greater detail the underlying structure of the benefits gained by students who engage in peer leadership roles. These preliminary results suggest that there may be eight key areas in which co- and extra-curricular peer leadership provides students with development of graduate capabilities additional to their academic studies. For the Australasian cohort of peer leaders examined here, key outcomes areas include: creative problem solving, appreciation of diversity, and belonging and contributing to the university community. It would be interesting to explore whether a similar structure underlies the benefits of peer leadership across international contexts.

The findings also suggest that many respondents were motivated by a desire to contribute to the wellbeing of other students, and perceived that to be the main outcome of their involvement in leadership programmes. However, some caution needs to be exercised in drawing any conclusions from this tentative finding about students' altruistic motivation. For a start, this does not mean that students who may be currently paid for their role as peer leaders (e.g. in the PASS/SI programmes) would do that willingly for no remuneration. For some students, earning extra money may be a necessity and they may consider it a happy coincidence that they are paid for something they enjoy doing. Without that remuneration they may not have been in a position to take up a leadership position. Furthermore, it is possible that students 'realised' post hoc that they enjoyed the

experience of 'giving back', rather than this being their initial motivation. Lastly, it is possible that 'altruistic' students (who are desirous to contribute), were more likely to be motivated to participate in the survey than less altruistic students.

Considering both individual items and factors, it seems that contribution to the campus community, a sense of belonging, and peer interaction all scored highly in respondents' perceived benefits of participation in the leadership programmes. Research into altruistic behavior (Martela & Ryan, 2015) and research from the field of positive psychology (Anik, Aknin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009; Nathan & Delle Fave, 2014; Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, & Fredrickson, 2006) suggest that all these forms of engagement contribute to people's overall well-being and life satisfaction. It would be interesting to speculate whether these research findings could inform recruitment campaigns to attract potential student leaders.

Research such as this could be very useful for an appreciation of the contribution that leadership programmes can make to the mission or strategic objectives of participating universities. For example, one of the universities involved in this project has a clear articulated interest in development of altruism in its strategic direction: "…we will harness student altruism for the betterment of both students and the wider community. Our commitment in this area is consistent with our wider ethos as a university that contributes to society" (University of Otago, 2013).

Considering the increasing importance that is placed on universities actively developing graduates outcomes (Spronken-Smith et al., 2015), this type of research could also highlight how student leadership programmes contribute to the realisation of a range of graduate outcomes. As Jackson (2016) emphasised, the focus of these should not be on a narrow range of work-ready employability skills, but on a more complex range of outcomes, including a resilience, self-belief, critical reflection and a sense of global citizenship.

Furthermore, a greater understanding of the perceived benefits of involvement in student leadership could inform both recruitment approaches to attracting leaders as well as the ongoing development of training programmes. Where certain outcomes are particularly valued by an institution, for example as part of realising intended graduate or employability outcomes, these could be more intentionally developed in leadership programmes, and subsequently could be evaluated to be part of a continuous improvement approach to leadership programmes.

Limitations

The relatively small number of respondents reflects the pilot nature of the current study. A more comprehensive survey roll-out (and participation encouragement) across leadership-related programmes in the participating institutions will likely substantiate the results obtained in the present study and allow for new insights.

A future survey could be further enhanced by inclusion of more items related to motivation for participation, particularly with regards to altruism, and items that would gain a better understanding of the contribution of participation to the leaders' overall well-being.

The survey seeks to understand respondents' perceived benefits of participation in leadership-related programmes. However, caution needs to be expressed that respondents' perceptions of the relative gains of these benefits may not necessarily manifest as actual gains. In addition, the benefits may not derive solely from participation in the leadership-related programmes. For example, some of their perceived benefits may result from other experiences during their time at university (or beyond). Future research could seek to elicit specific examples from students for each of the benefits so as to assess or 'verify' their perceptions.

Conclusion

This pilot study investigated students' perceptions of the benefits of being involved in leadership programs. The results overwhelming indicate that students perceive there to be strong positive gains across a broad range of areas from their participation in leadership programmes or roles. Further, the free text comments suggest that the motivation for our particular cohort of respondents to participate in student leadership programmes was more altruistic than instrumental.

Understanding the outcomes of participation in leadership roles and leadership programmes in higher education is important for the planning and ongoing improvement of leadership development training and programs. It may also be advantageous for institutions to make the benefits and outcomes of leadership programs more explicit in, and align more intentionally to, the strategic objectives of an institution. We consider this to be particularly relevant for the contribution that leadership-related experiences make to graduate outcomes.

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