

# Exploring the Outcomes of an Academic Leadership Program: Building a Bridge Between Learning Across Difference

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## Abstract

The application of leadership learning in a post-collegiate context provides an opportunity for higher education institutions to understand the long-term influence of these programs. Key findings from this Florida university suggest that former students who hold minoritized identities were able to understand the identity exploration question in more detail, whereas students with dominant identities struggled to process the question or had difficulty with application to learning across difference in their post-college lives. Finally, alumni who hold minoritized identities discussed dismantling systems of oppression and creating systemic change, whereas alumni who held more dominant identities cited a general responsibility to their community. We call for academic leadership programs to center social justice concepts in their program outcomes. By not exploring how students are engaging in social justice conversations and learning across difference, universities continue to reproduce systems of oppressive power, no matter how unintentionally these outcomes may be for academic leadership programs.

**Keywords:** leadership learning, diversity, alumni, curriculum

## Introduction

Leadership learning is defined as “changes in knowledge, skills, behavior, attitudes, and values resulting from educational experiences, both co-curricular and curricular in nature, associated with the activity of leadership” (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 57). Outcomes of leadership learning within curricular leadership studies programs are rarely explored post-degree completion. The application of leadership learning in a post-collegiate context provides an opportunity for institutions to understand the long-term influence of these programs and aid in fine-tuning leadership educator praxis, rooted in addressing and redressing social inequities.

Historically, research in leadership education has highlighted the importance of sociocultural conversations, including learning across and about difference; however, there has been a disconnect in acknowledging and addressing systems of inequality that perpetuate differences (Dugan, 2017). This study explored the leadership learning of 51 alumni of an undergraduate academic leadership certificate at a Florida public university. Specifically, this study highlights how students learned across difference and made meaning, or did not, as a result of engaging in leadership learning. The university academic program features an 18-credit, interdisciplinary course sequence exploring leadership in multiple contexts through practical and service-learning experiences. This study explored alumni’s integration of leadership learning, including the ways they have applied critical perspectives of leadership education or learning across differences in their current roles, and has implications for educators to better understand how undergraduate students, who explore social justice topics in leadership education, are able to have further conversations across differences as alumni. The insight gained from this Florida university can

contribute to making future curriculum content relevant and applicable to students' undergraduate and post-collegiate experiences when centering leadership and learning across differences.

## **Review of the Literature**

The establishment of academic leadership programs in higher education showcases the field's investment in leadership learning. Early course offerings in higher education began in the 1980s (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018), increasing the presence of curricular leadership programs throughout the field (Brungardt et al., 2006; Guthrie, Teig, & Hu, 2018). These programs exist at over 1,000 higher education institutions (Komives, 2011). Guthrie and colleagues (2018) identified 1,558 curricular leadership programs in the United States in 2018. Academic leadership programs span degree and certificate type to include associate certificates, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Additionally, programs are generally housed within undergraduate and graduate-level certificates (Guthrie et al., 2018). Academic leadership programs are often interdisciplinary or situated in academic disciplines. Brungardt et al. (2006) noted academic leadership programs' existence in a wide range of academic departments, including psychology, sociology, and education.

### ***Academic Leadership Programs in the State of Florida***

Guthrie and colleagues (2018) shared a report that represents academic leadership programs from 49 states in the U.S. (all except Alaska). Three states contain the most academic leadership programs: California ( $n = 119$ ), Minnesota ( $n = 81$ ), and Florida ( $n = 66$ ; Guthrie et al., 2018). The information on course offerings was further analyzed to examine course sequencing and types of courses most frequently offered within leadership programs represented in the Guthrie et al. (2018) study. The national findings highlight that although all leadership programs vary by discipline and course offerings, there was consistency across programs for course offerings in theory, communication, and experiential leadership learning classes (Guthrie et al., 2018). This is true for the state of Florida as well. Through course catalog website analysis, we found that leadership courses at public universities in the state of Florida have the prefix designation of LDR. Many of the LDR courses across the state are listed in an interdisciplinary academic certificate or minor programs. These academic leadership programs focus on developing several dimensions of leadership understanding and skills for undergraduate students that include communication, collaboration, social relations, civics, and ethics.

### ***Outcomes of Leadership Learning***

Higher education's responsibility to prepare future leaders continues to support the advancement of leadership education. Institutional outcomes focused on career readiness and civic engagement position leadership learning alongside student success (Kuh et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Student success within this research is understood as "academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, and attainment of educational objectives" (Kuh et al., 2011, p. 10). Student success outcomes reflect the need to develop students to critically engage in complex social issues and participate in a democratic society.

Outcomes from academic leadership programs at accredited institutions contributed to the development of 60 student leadership competencies (Seemiller, 2013). Leadership competencies aid in an individual's contributions and or engagement in role or task. Competencies are categorized into four dimensions: knowledge, value, ability (motivation or skill), and behavior (Seemiller, 2016). These competency-based characteristics note leadership learning's influence throughout several academic fields. Wagner and Cilente (2011) highlighted that the nature of interdisciplinary and integrative leadership learning reaches beyond "simply a mastery of facts"

(p. 383) to develop knowledge for problem solving. Outcomes of leadership learning exist beyond students' undergraduate journeys. Mitchell and Daugherty (2019) found student alumni utilize leadership language and apply leadership knowledge to their everyday experiences. Additionally, student alumni expressed career progression and increased marketability resulting from their application of leadership learning and skills throughout their careers (Mitchell & Daugherty, 2019).

### ***Learning and Dialoguing Across Difference***

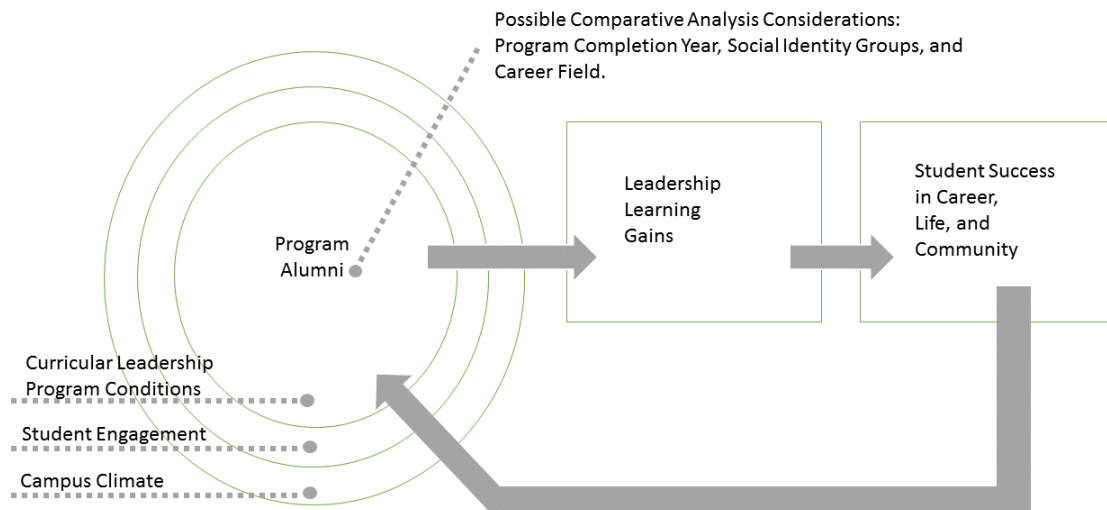
Discourse in leadership education denotes a mutual interest in promoting social responsibility and social change (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Owen, 2012). Curricular and co-curricular experiences centering learning about and engagement across difference are noted to support such development (Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, 2005). Smith (2009) shared that conversations related to diversity or interactions amongst students from various communities aids in critical thinking, increased tolerance, openness to diverse concepts, and high levels of development and student satisfaction. Mayhew and Fernandez (2007) found discussions focused on diversity and spaces for reflection enhanced students' understanding of social justice. Participation in socio-cultural conversations were identified to positively influence social perspective taking (Johnson, 2015). Socio-cultural conversations are defined as "formal and informal dialogues with peers about differences as well as interactions across differences" (Dugan et al., 2013, p. 8). Additionally, socio-cultural conversations across difference amongst college students serve as the greatest predictor of socially responsible leadership capacity (Dugan et al., 2013). This study seeks to strengthen our understanding of students' outcomes after participation and completion of an undergraduate certificate in leadership studies at a Florida public university (FPU).

## **Conceptual Framework & Research Questions**

Guthrie and colleagues (2018) report provided data for the increased emphasis on the core outcome of higher education (i.e., leadership), which resulted in colleges and universities investing more in academic leadership programs (Komives et al., 2011). The Guthrie et al. (2018) report highlights the types of academic leadership programs in the U.S., but does not provide insight on if these programs impact students' leadership learning or share specific ways these programs contribute to students' success after college. Although some researchers are beginning to study this topic (Mitchell & Daugherty, 2019; Stephens & Beatty, 2015), this would require a deeper analysis of program alumni experiences. These alumni experiences of academic leadership programs are informed by institutional climate, as well as how other co-curricular activities contribute to students' leadership learning and success outcomes.

The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1) is informed by Guthrie and Jenkins's (2018) definition of leadership learning and Kuh and colleagues' (2007) guiding framework on student success, which provides a more in-depth and nuanced path of factors that contribute to student success. Kuh and colleagues (2007) identified that student success includes grades, graduation, and student learning gains, with the following post-college outcomes: employment, graduate or professional school, and lifelong learning. For the conceptual framework for this study, we stress that student success includes leadership learning gains. Finally, we argue that leadership learning is influencing post-college outcomes and experiences within career, life, and community. Next, we will explain the conceptual framework in relation to the leadership program alumni's learning gains for student success and application after earning an undergraduate degree.

**Figure 1.** *Conceptual Framework of Leadership Learning for Student Success*



This conceptual framework centers the context of the curricular leadership program, where the program alumni serve as the units of analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Through our research design and analysis for this study, we posit that the program alumni are at the center and their program completion year, social identity group membership, or career fields influence the ways in which the leadership program alumni apply leadership learning after college. However, the program alumni do not experience the academic leadership program absent of context, including time-sensitive curricular leadership program and campus climate conditions, as well as the alumni’s student engagement experiences (i.e., other involvement or engagement while in college). Therefore, to explore the alumni participants’ leadership learning, the following research questions guided the data collection and analysis for this study:

1. How does leadership learning at this FPU contribute to student success after graduation?
2. How did completing a curricular leadership studies program influence alumni’s leadership learning?

## Methods and Case Overview

The academic leadership program at this FPU features an 18-credit, interdisciplinary course sequence that explores leadership in multiple contexts through experiential and service-learning components. All undergraduate students at this FPU are eligible to enroll in the academic leadership certificate program. The program requires students to complete five core courses and one approved supporting course. Various learning objectives guide course content, such as: leadership theories, service-learning, leading change, experiential learning, and systematic reflection. The course also has three identity-based courses (Black Male Leadership, Latinx Leadership, and Women in Leadership) that were added within the past five years, and some alumni did not have the option to experience these courses. The supporting course option allows students to connect leadership concepts to their discipline and program of study. Several programmatic outcomes of the leadership certificate were identified as a result of students’ completion. Students will showcase the ability to demonstrate leadership skills including decision-making, directing others, team building, taking initiative, persuading, performing/presenting, educating, confronting, and negotiating. Additionally, students will demonstrate leadership knowledge and application of leadership theories, dynamics of leadership development, group and organizational dynamics, leadership strategies, and leader accountability

(ethics and values clarification). While the case for this study refers to the academic leadership program as a certificate, many institutions in the state of Florida discern these same requirements for an academic minor.

### **Data Collection**

A qualitative case study design and data collection were employed for this study. As of Spring 2020, almost 250 students had graduated from the program at the FPU since its creation in 2008. This FPU is a large public university with approximately 40,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Over the course of this project, 189 alumni of the academic leadership program were recruited through electronic mail, resulting in 74 consenting to participate. Data collection included 51 in-depth interviews utilizing an interview guide approach to focus conversations on topics related to the student's leadership learning applications (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Twenty participants (see Appendix A) were included for analysis based on the research questions that guided this study. A single interview with each participant lasted between 45–60 minutes in length and was audio-recorded for transcription. When students self-identified their social identities, they were noted and compiled (see Appendix A). Transcribed copies of interviews were provided to participants for member-checking and were reformatted to include pseudonyms. As participants shared their self-identified social identities during the interviews, they were noted and included in the participant demographic sheet (see Appendix A). The 20 participants who were included for this cross-case analysis were selected based on the guiding research questions.

### **Data Analysis**

For the purpose of exploring deeper meaning across cases and within each case, we employed a cross-case analysis approach (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2009). Rossman and Rallis (2012) described the benefits of using cross-case analysis and stated, “these analyses respect the integrity of each case and then seek commonalities across cases, as well as differences” (p. 103). In the exploration phase of data analysis, all 20 participants were coded by a research team with four members and a case summary was written for each. The brief case summaries offered synthesis of each case and an overall analysis across cases.

Next, a meta-matrix was created with descriptive data including career fields, social identities, student engagement/involvement activities, and other relevant information. A case analysis meeting with the research team occurred to discuss the summaries and key coding considerations. Throughout the data analysis process, the research team engaged in reflexivity memoing, noting their own positionality and possible biases (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The researchers not only explored how leadership learning is applied in alumni's post-college experiences, but also what might be attributed to their collegiate experiences broadly and the academic leadership program specifically. The analysis identified leadership learning patterns and themes, and also included an analysis of any explanatory effects from the program curriculum resulting in learning across difference or learning about strategies to address social inequities.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Findings highlighted the practice of reflection for alumni, appreciation for collaboration and building relationships, and an ability to apply their past leadership coursework and curriculum to their current professional and personal leadership experiences. The researchers were interested in exploring how completing a curricular leadership studies program influenced their leadership learning and application of that learning in their career, personal life, and community. Former students who hold minoritized identities were able to understand the identity exploration question in more detail, whereas students with dominant identities struggled to process the question or had difficulty with application to learning across difference in their current lives. Further, alumni with

minoritized identities were the only participants who discussed dismantling systems of oppression and creating systemic change, whereas alumni who held more dominant identities cited a general responsibility to their community.

As we will discuss, the most salient social identity difference across discourses about systemic change versus a general responsibility to community was their racial or ethnic identity, where white alumni shared a general community responsibility and Alumni of Color described the need to create systemic change to disrupt injustices. Similar to Harris et al. (2019), we acknowledge that whiteness is omnipresent and embedded throughout higher education and leadership education, including in curriculum, programs, research, and theory (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2018; Cabrera et al., 2016). Guided by the work of Lindsay Pérez Huber (2010), we capitalize “Asian,” “Black,” and other minoritized groups, including “People of Color,” as a form of linguistic empowerment. We do not capitalize “white” to challenge hegemonic grammatical norms and “reject the grammatical representation of power capitalization brings to the term ‘white’” (Pérez Huber, 2010, p. 93). For the purpose of this study, the researchers questioned the ways the curricular leadership program integrated considerations of social location, social identities, and social issues into the curriculum, because as research has shown and in our own experiences, those who hold minoritized identities will consider the disparate impact of systemic oppression as a result of their everyday, lived experiences without educational prompting. The alumni who described a need for systemic change in society and in their spheres of influence did not attribute learned strategies, values, or beliefs as a result of their leadership learning through the curricular program.

A little over half of the alumni in the study, all of whom identified as white, described the academic leadership program contributed to their general ability to work with others, including increasing their awareness and understanding of differing perspectives or experiences. Participants cited the importance of dialogue through the coursework for challenging their assumptions and understanding the ways lived experiences matter to interpreting leadership experiences. For example, Elizabeth who is a white woman in the law field, described the capstone course in particular had increased her ability to challenge her own assumptions through dialogue and stated:

I think not many people have the opportunity to get to know other people that don't necessarily come from the same friend groups, or walks of life, or that you wouldn't otherwise have that close of an interaction with, and just truly sit there and hear what they think and how they process it.

Further, two participants, both Women of Color, described the academic leadership program allowed them to see themselves as leaders and helped break down traditional connotations of who a leader can or cannot be.

### ***Working Across Difference—Identity, Experience, and Environment***

In the interviews, researchers asked two explicit questions to address reflection on social identities and how participants create environments that are welcoming of diverse cultural perspectives. Although we hoped the alumni would address these considerations in the broader questions, we also wanted to understand how they applied key learning outcomes from the academic leadership program when working in collaboration with others. The social identity question resulted in a mixture of confusion, broad or brief responses, and detailed examples of how their social identities shaped their perceptions. The participants who expressed confusion were white alumni and were representative of this statement: “Okay. And what exactly do you mean, ‘identities’?” After explained in more detail, the participants still struggled to think of ways

their social identities shape their perception of their current environment. Madelyn had a realization of gender discrimination through her post-college experiences. Additionally, Danielle seemed aware of her social identities and willing to learn from people that were different from her:

I [am]... white, female, heterosexual. Pretty much ... I have a very limited lens and background, I feel like. Anytime I can learn from different groups of people, different coworkers, students, I love taking opportunities to do that, just so I can check myself sometimes, and realize that everybody has different situations.

The white alumni in the study regularly named opportunities in their post-college life to learn from those who hold different social identities than them. But some white women struggled to explicitly name race but were able to highlight class and gendered experiences. For example, Elizabeth, who is a white woman, did not mention race in relation to her Teach for America experience in a racially minoritized school district. She was only able to explicitly acknowledge class and gender as key social identity groups in relation to her experience. Karen is a white woman raised in rural Florida who highlights her process of still understanding her identities:

So I would say that that's something I'm still working through, but getting to a better place and understanding how my identity really does—like my identity as a woman and all these things shaping how I view the world, and also help me understand how others around me might view it very differently than I do, and like how to successfully engage in this conversation, and to be able to understand one another a little more.

Here Karen is working through understanding how her identities shape her views of the world and how others view her. James shared his experience of being one of two men who completed the leadership certificate in his cohort. James did highlight how being in the gender minority offered up an opportunity to take in different perspectives:

Of course, I want to advocate for more males to join the program, because during my capstone course it was just me and one other male that joined that was able to graduate from the program... For me though, it really helped me keep that open mind... That helped me move forward in other leadership decisions to have that other kind of spectrum mindset. To not always think that I'm right. To always take other things into aspect. I'm not sure how the program is now, what the percentage of male to female is, but back then about a year and a half ago, two years ago it was pretty feminine females.

In comparison, we had four participants who identify as Black women, one participant identified as a Latina woman, and one participant identified as a Woman of Color; and each had a heightened awareness of their social identities and the social identities of others, stemming from their social location. Chantal, who identifies as a Woman of Color, noted that she had to be accommodating to the undergraduate's students that may hold different identities than she does when working in her current role as an advisor:

Being a Woman of Color, it's very easy to be welcoming to others because I know that they're not always going to get it. So, as an advisor, I do see a lot of students from a lot of different backgrounds, a lot of different places, and a lot of different parts of the world. Things are always different. What I try to do is be accommodating of this and understanding that, especially with certain students, there are going to be differences. How can I better understand them and their differences?

Similar to Chantal, Kyli stressed that the intersections of identifying as a Black woman comes with its challenges and rewards. Kyli highlights that the intersections of her identity allow for her to show up with “culturally different insight” and that actually proves to be an asset to the department where she works. The Women of Color in the study were able to articulate key voids

in their current work environments when it comes to exploring concepts of diversity and identity. Jade, who was in graduate school working in leadership education, points out:

For example, when we talk about leadership, we don't discuss identity, and we don't talk about social identities and we don't talk about marginalization... I feel as though those are very important to talk about when we do workshop trainings... with students, and they find it's not helpful because it makes them uncomfortable. I feel like the more I keep telling my supervisor that those conversations are important because leaders don't just identify as white, woman, and male. You have different identities that can tie into leadership.

Jade described the need for integrating social identity, social location, and deconstructing normative assumptions about leadership through academic leadership curriculum.

### ***Dismantling Systems of Oppression or General Responsibility for Community***

Participants were asked through the interview, "How are you involved in making change in your community?" As previously described, the program utilized in this case study focuses on both change and community through the academic leadership program curriculum. The alumni had a range of responses—some citing systemic change and some citing a general responsibility to their community. Participants who described a general responsibility to their community shared a commitment to be a good citizen, citing specific actions or volunteer work with non-profit health organizations, young professional or alumni groups, churches, business networks, neighborhood associations, and youth mentoring. Logan, a participant who identified as a gay, white man described participating in the Women's March and hoping to do more human rights volunteer work in order to connect to his passions. Serena, a Black woman, described her involvement in an LGBTQ organization and how she has increased her consciousness of what or where she spends her money, citing the importance of supporting movies with an all Black cast as an example.

Participants who held one or more minoritized identity, such as Women of Color or gay men, expressed a longing for systemic change at the societal level and within their spheres of influence. Logan continued to describe the need to change who is represented in his field of television and stated:

And in order to see yourself and be able to, I guess, communicate that the world is open to showcasing all diversity, we have to be the people that change that. Even the sense of having more gay people on television, and things like that, I'm really passionate about. And seeing more defined roles, other than—the angry Black woman role is so overplayed. And angry Black man.

Logan identified an area where he could influence change and expressed with clarity that he has the capacity to ensure representation through television. Serena described that she became more critical of how she is perceived because of the intersections of both her race and her gender:

I'm a Black woman, which is fine for me, but I know that statistically there's a lot of prejudice against Black women. I'm wondering [why] does that happen? Is it because I'm a woman? Is it because I'm Black? Is it because of this? On paper I sound nice, so I think what are these other factors that are coming into play that I can't see?

Similarly, Jade who also identifies as a Black woman, shared how she engages in conversation with her supervisor about how to better support the students they work with and the frustration of not addressing systemic issues of injustices:



I think it has a lot to do with how I express myself in different settings. I talk to my supervisor a lot about the things that need to happen in our group that we advise, which is called Student Leadership Advocates. It's already problematic when you have leadership advocates, like you have those two words, and it's not practiced in different contexts.

Jade discussed that she is passionate when telling her supervisor that “leaders don’t just identify as White, woman, and male. You have different identities that can tie into leadership.” Jade went on to share that she “think(s) expressing passion is important... so you can get [others] on the same page as to how you want to create change.”

These findings reveal that participants’ race/ethnicity was the most salient social identity when discussing issues of systemic change versus a general responsibility to community. White alumni shared a general community responsibility and alumni of Color described the need to create systemic change to address injustices. Some participants were clearly confused with the social identity question, some had broad or brief responses, and others had detailed examples of how their social identities shaped their experiences. Some alumni made clear connections to the academic leadership program for contributing to their reflection and meaning making in terms of identity and addressing systemic issues, while other participants noted they came to these realizations after college.

## Discussion

By not exploring how students are engaging in social justice conversations and learning across difference, some Florida universities continue to reproduce and reconstitute systems of oppressive power, no matter how unintentionally these outcomes may be for academic leadership programs. The implications for student learning are they will have difficulty learning across difference or be able to articulate the ways power systems in society continue to perpetuate oppression, as highlighted in the findings of this study. Learning is integrated in curricular and co-curricular leadership settings in higher education (Guthrie et al., 2013). Alumni who held minoritized identities discussed dismantling systems of oppression and creating systemic change, whereas alumni who held more dominant identities cited a general responsibility to their community without making connections to their social identities explicitly. Based on the findings from this study, students who held minoritized identities are yearning for this knowledge and desiring leadership education informed by critical perspectives.

The findings from this study also highlight how it is crucial to consider the socialization of being a leadership educator, how the system often limits our perceptions of student capacity for complex issues, and the ways systems of oppression influence the models or theories we select for curriculum. If leadership educators are not interrogating their socialization and beliefs or the way our structures inform or limit our ability to be free thinking, then we are doing a disservice to the student experience and leadership education (Chunoo et al., 2019). If we are really seeking diversity, equity, and inclusion, then leadership educators must approach the work differently (Chunoo et al., 2019). Through the following recommendations, we suggest that leadership academic programs should incorporate and center social justice concepts in program and learning outcomes, including both social justice ideals and social justice as a leadership practice in pursuit of developing critical perspectives among students and future alumni as they learn across difference (Chunoo et al., 2019).

## Recommendations

Inequality is deeply embedded in the history of Florida, and therefore as educators, it is critical to organize around changing systemic and structural inequalities. Environment matters. The state of Florida continues to serve as a hub for diverse lived experiences and perspectives with the

increase in racial and ethnic communities, rural vs. urban geographic regions, and increase of undocumented students enrolling in higher education. Florida also continues to be a state impacted by a broad range of social issues like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), police brutality, human trafficking, gun violence, etc. Without this curriculum shift, students/alumni may lack the capacity to critically reflect and or have the knowledge to create action steps to address their community's issues with equity and justice across social identities. This curriculum shift should include experiential learning in academic leadership programs that have a foundation of service to the community. These service-learning experiences have to be critically rooted in social justice issues that address power, privilege, and oppression for communities across the state of Florida. Inequality is perpetuated and maintained at the individual/micro and structural/macro level, which requires critical thinking about social inequalities and strategies for systemic change.

### ***Recommendations for Intergroup Dialogue in Curriculum***

Learning across difference entails being in learning spaces with those individuals who hold social identities and lived experiences that differ from yours; however, as stated by Smith (2009), intergroup efforts “cannot be based on a naive notion that contact produces good results” (p. 191). A recommendation we offer is for leadership academic programs to consider the key components of intergroup dialogue programs as one way to engage students in meaningful and substantive interaction across difference during class discussions. Intergroup dialogue initiatives bring together students from different social identity groups in a sustained and facilitated learning environment. As a pedagogical method, intergroup dialogue challenges students to explore issues of diversity and equity and their personal and social responsibility for building a more just society (Zúñiga et al., 2007). Dialogue is a collaborative communication process that engages students in exchanges that highlight similarities and differences in lived experiences (Zúñiga et al., 2007). Nagda (2006) pointed out three broad goals of intergroup dialogue, represented as outcomes: (a) to develop intergroup understanding by helping students explore their own and others' social identities and statuses and the role of social structures in relationships of privilege and inequality, (b) to foster positive intergroup relationships by developing students' empathy and motivation to bridge differences of identities and statuses, and (c) to foster intergroup collaboration for personal and social responsibility toward greater social justice. By centering pedagogical methods guided by concepts of intergroup dialogue, academic leadership programs in the state of Florida prioritize outcomes rooted in addressing power, privilege, and oppression at the individual and structural level.

### ***Recommendations for Leadership Educators to Consider Culturally Relevant Leadership Curriculum***

It is crucial to consider the socialization of being a leadership educator, how the system often limits educator perceptions of student capacity for complex issues, and the ways systems of oppression influence the models or theories we select for curriculum. The Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning model (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016) seeks to be liberatory, but if leadership educators are not interrogating their socialization and beliefs or the ways higher education and leadership education structures inform or limit their ability to be free thinking or to center justice, leadership education is doing a disservice to the model and student experience. If leadership educators are really seeking for students to learn across difference, then educators should approach the work differently and center the lived experiences of People of Color and other minoritized identities in the leadership education curriculum (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016).

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Future research on academic leadership programs and in leadership education should continue to understand alumni application of the leadership education curriculum. This study aimed to contribute to the understanding of student success in relation to leadership learning through contributing to the knowledge on post-collegiate application of the long-term influences of these programs. More research on students' learning across difference is needed to inform the benefits and key outcomes after college, as well as the integration of social justice as a core leadership learning practice. Additionally, research on pedagogical methods leadership educators employ to support key components of intergroup dialogue could contribute to developing new curricula and learning outcomes. Minimal research has been done on the outcomes of intergroup interactions for students with minoritized identities, which can cause added stress, distrust, and responsibility in educating their white peers (Smith, 2009); therefore, future research should center student experiences and voices from marginalized communities.

### **Conclusions**

Academic leadership programs across the state of Florida and United States could use the framing of the case described in this study to consider key outcomes of their programs and how alumni are applying those learning outcomes to their personal and professional lives. The data from this case showed that alumni overwhelmingly perceived their capacity to engage in learning across difference was enhanced through their completion of the academic leadership program. However, this finding is complicated by our cross-case analysis of alumni's social identities, social location, and discourse when addressing their post-college leadership practice. We must question, as educators, who benefits and who is harmed in the classroom if learning across difference occurs that is void of social justice ideals and practices that address and readdress social inequities.

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## Appendix A

### Participants' Case and Demographic Information

Case number	Pseudonym	Complexity completion year	Social identities	Race and gender (if known)
38	Jeff	2015 SP	Male, first-generation college student, single parent household, 23 (young)	White man
39	Karen	2013 FA	Raised in rural FL	White woman
41	Andrea	2015 SP	Woman, (young)	White woman
42	Logan	2016 SP	Man, gay	White man
43	Chantal	2012 FA	Woman of Color	Woman of Color
44	Kyli	2011 SP	Black woman, Christian	Black woman
45	Lindsey	2015 FA	White woman	White woman
46	Ariella	2016 SP	Black woman, first-generation college student	Black woman
47	Mark	2008 SP	No mention of social identities	White man
48	Elizabeth	2012 FA	White woman	White woman
49	Michaela	2010 SP	Did not share	White woman
50	Patrick	2013 SP	Man, Jewish, gay	White man
51	Serena	2015 SP	Black woman	Black woman
52	Mariana	2016 SP	Woman of Color (Latina), raised in South FL, low-SES	Woman of Color
53	Danielle	2009 SP	Marketing major, student affairs professional, wife and mother	White woman
54	James	2016 FA	Military	White man
55	Jade	2016 FA	Black woman	Black woman
56	Madelyn	2011 FA	Privileged educational experiences	White woman
57	Thomas	2007 FA	White man, raised in predominantly White community	White man
58	Ben	2012 SP	White, potentially man, LGBTQ	White man

*Note.* FA = fall; SP = spring