First-Generation College Students’ Leadership

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A Presentation, In Three Acts

• Act One: study examining whether socioeconomic variables (including first-generation status) are associated with students’ involvement in positional leadership

• Act Two: study examining the academic benefits of first-generation students’ involvement in leadership

• Act Three: where do we go from here?
College Students’ Leadership

- Higher education institutions are increasingly viewing college students’ leadership as an important outcome

- While leadership is more than positional, positional leadership has several benefits for students and their campus communities
  - Multicultural competence, civic responsibility, personal responsibility, teamwork and decision-making skills, career and personal outcomes
Leadership Inequities

- Women have higher leadership capacities but lower leadership self-efficacy than men (Dugan & Komives, 2007)
- Women’s leadership efficacy increases but at a lower rate than male peers (Dugan et al., under review)
- Women reported higher scores on socially responsible leadership scale (Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008)
- Males reported lower leadership development than females (Soria & Johnson, in press—and will also be presented Sunday at ILA)
Leadership Inequities

• Asian-Pacific American, African American/Black, and Native American students have lower scores on many scales of socially responsible leadership (Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008)

• Asian-Pacific American students scored lower on almost all socially responsible leadership scales than other racial/ethnic groups at my own institution (Soria, Nobbe, & Fink, 2013)
Leadership Inequities

• International students reported lower leadership development than their peers (Soria, Roberts, & Reinhard, in press—also presented at ILA this morning)

• Hispanic, Black, and Asian American students reported higher leadership development while International students reported lower leadership development (Soria & Johnson, under review—and will also be presented at ILA on Sunday)
Is Leadership for Everyone?

- Inequitable access to resources
- Cultural messages regarding social status
- Genuine fears of safety or negative consequences
- Everyone can be a leader—this view may further marginalize groups in its failure to acknowledge greater social systems in which leadership occurs (Dugan, 2011)
Gaps in Scholarship

• While we have insights into gender and race/ethnicity differences in students’ leadership involvement, capacities, and efficacy, we lack knowledge about whether socioeconomic variables are associated with students’ leadership.

• Purpose: to investigate whether socioeconomic variables are associated with college students’ positional leadership.
Methods: Instrument

- Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey
- Administered at six large, public research universities in 2012
- 120,536 students \rightarrow 39,777 (33\%) \rightarrow 5,572
Methods: Measures

• Dependent variable
  – Students participation as a leader in one of 13 different student clubs, groups, or organizations
  – Dummy-coded: 0 = never/participant, 1 = leader/officer

• Independent variables:
  – Gender, race/ethnicity, college experiences (academic major, GPA, housing location, importance of leadership, academic level)
Methods: Measures

- Socioeconomic status variables:
  - First-generation status
  - Family income in four categories
    - Less than $19,999 per year
    - $20,000 to $49,999 per year
    - $50,000 to $79,999 per year
    - $80,000 to $99,999 per year
    - (compared against over $100,000 per year)
  - Hours spent in employment
    - 1-20 hours/week
    - Over 20 hours/week
    - (compared against not employed)
Results

• Logistic regression analyses
  – Significantly less likely to serve as a positional leader:
    • Less than $19,999 per year
    • $20,000 to $49,999 per year
    • First-generation students
    • Employed over 20 hours per week
    • Living with family
First-Generation Students

- First-generation students have lower academic achievement, retention, and graduation rates than their peers who are not the first in their families to attend higher education
Leadership is Awesome!

- Positional leaders effect social change (Soria, Fink, Lepkowski, & Snyder, 2013)
- Leadership and overall engagement is important to college students’ success—especially if peers can share valuable social capital
- Can institutions look toward leadership opportunities to bolster first-generation students’ success?
Methods: Instrument

• Multi-institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) survey
• Distributed to 4,000 randomly-selected students (out of 29,000) in 2009
• Response rate was 39.0% \((n = 1,560)\)
• 29.1% \((n = 453)\) were first-generation
Methods: Model & Measures

**Block One**
Demographics, pre-college leadership, pre-college leader efficacy

**Block Two**
College experiences, academic major, working, class standing

**Block Three**
Leadership participation, efficacy, workshops, 8 C’s

Cumulative GPA
Results

- Among first-generation students, the following leadership variables were positively associated with students’ cumulative GPA
  - Community service
  - Leader in on-campus activities
  - Engagement in social change
  - Consciousness of self
  - Congruence
  - Collaboration
Discussion

• First-generation students are significantly less likely to participate as leaders in student organizations
• Yet, participation in several different types of leadership activities is positively associated with first-generation students’ academic achievement
Next Steps

• Increased attention to socioeconomic indicators (like first-generation status) in leadership development and participation research

• Unpacking social structures limiting students’ involvement so as to increase their involvement
  – Finances, stipends
  – Time and effort required for working students
Next Steps

- Hierarchical definitions of leaders are limiting and often incongruent with some culture’s beliefs about collaboration and interdependence
  - While my own research on positional leadership shared insights it was limiting in this regard; therefore, more scholarship on non-hierarchical, non-positional leadership would be a welcome addition to the field
Next Steps

• Scan the environment—what is the campus climate for first-generation students?
• Working-class students often feel like outsiders in the middle-class culture of higher education (in traditional four-year schools)
• Many middle/upper-class students arrive on campus already involved in student organizations
Some publications mentioned here (and please email for other citations):


- Soria, K. M., & Johnson, M. Preparing future citizens and leaders by developing college students’ multicultural competence. (revise and resubmit)

- Soria, K. M., & Johnson, M. High-impact practices to promote college students’ leadership and multicultural competence.