

Gender differences among contributing leadership development resources.

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Abstract

Gender differences among contributing student leadership development resources were examined within the context of the theory-based perspectives of leadership-related attributes. The findings suggest that students' increased engagement with institutional constituencies cultivates an environment conducive to students' cognitive development toward leadership. Implications of the findings for subsequent research on student leadership development are presented.

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The majority of research on student leadership development has focused on corporate-related models, which emphasize the impact of institutional experiences that parallel roles found in business or politics. Other commonly examined attributes include entering students' predisposition to leadership development, available institutional-related leadership resources, activities and opportunities, and the effects of formal leadership development programs. Unfortunately, students not actively engaged in official leadership-based programs, roles, or activities may be overlooked concerning their leadership growth, development, and potential (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Dugan, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005; Posner, 2004; Wielkiewicz, Prom, & Loos, 2005).

Attempting to capture and examine students' cognitive development toward leadership without dependence on predispositions toward leadership-based activities or positions, Wielkiewicz (2000) developed the Leadership

Attitudes and Beliefs Scale-III (LABS-III). The LABS-III instrument consists of two scales representing divergent patterns of leadership behavior. One scale is based on a hierarchical pattern of thinking, which is characteristic of the traditional top-down leadership structure. The Hierarchical Thinking scale emphasizes a tightly controlled decision-making process, with an authoritarian mode of operation and communication. A leader's effectiveness and efficiency are paramount to the success of the organization, which in turn, is strongly associated with one's maintenance and preservation of rank within that organization (Bass, 1990; Bolman & Deal, 2003; House & Podsakoff, 1994). The second scale derives from Allen, Stelzner, and Wielkiewicz's (1998) leadership process theory, which is based on a systemic pattern of thinking. The Systemic Thinking scale strongly emphasizes an organization's ability to adapt quickly to ever-changing environments. Employing the knowledge and wisdom of organizational members through high levels of communication and cooperation is paramount to a successful organization. In this manner, the effectiveness of a leader is dependent on one's ability to successfully facilitate and utilize a participative decision-making process.

The LABS-III instrument has been utilized, although not extensively, in exploring the development of students' leadership attitudes and beliefs and its relationship to the differential patterns of student learning and growth. Studies by Wielkiewicz et al. (2005) and Thompson (2006) reported evidence that student engage-

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