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# Impact of Leadership Education on Perceptions of Job Readiness in Undergraduate students

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IMPACT OF LEADERSHP EDUCATION ON PERCEPTIONS OF JOB READINESS
IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

by

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# DEDICATION

To my husband, Ben, for his astounding support throughout the past three years and to Cindy Raper, my greatest advocate and lifelong editor.

ABSTRACT

Based on previous findings from employers, undergraduate students, and universities regarding workforce readiness, action is needed to improve students' knowledge and skills in areas such as professionalism, communication, problem solving, and leadership. The increase in undergraduate leadership education curricula and programs over the past few decades has been significant. While research has been done on the relationship between leadership education and specific knowledge and skillsets, further research is needed on the impact of leadership education on perceived job readiness. This paper outlines the purpose, background, methodology, and findings of an action research study on the relationship between leadership education and job readiness. A review of the literature is provided that explores: (a) leadership education including the evolution of leadership, types of leadership education, and undergraduate leadership programs; (b) job readiness discussing employer and student perceived job readiness; (c) university response to job readiness; and (d) how to assess job readiness. The first research question asked, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students?" The second research question added, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in diverse undergraduate student populations?" The methodology utilized for the qualitative action research was an exploratory case study design. Based on the coding results, seven themes emerged as having significant connections in relationship to the research questions. The findings of this study indicate that there are important components of leadership education that may

have positive impacts on students' perceptions of job readiness and self-efficacy for leadership in the workforce.

*Keywords:*  leadership education, job readiness, action research, undergraduate education, public health education, public health leadership

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

**Introduction**

The purpose of education is to foster intellectual growth, engage a commitment to the betterment of society, and promote inquiry and creative thought in the rational person (Buoncristiani & Buoncristiani, 2012).  While difficult to achieve, these goals are of utmost importance to all citizens.  For job readiness and career success, employers are looking for people who can communicate both orally and in writing, have strong decision-making and problem-solving skills, are adaptable, and have the ability to manage both time and priorities (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012).  These key principles require an emphasis on the synthesis and application of knowledge as well as innovative thinking and leadership skills.  If employers require a person who is capable of such abilities, then the curriculum should reflect the role needed in the field.

**Statement of the Problem of Practice (PoP)**

In the average bachelor's degree program at an American public or private liberal education institution, students are exposed to a wide variety of courses and subject areas, including languages, literature, humanities, arts, and natural sciences.  Additionally, students are required to select a field for in-depth study, known as their undergraduate major.  According to the Association of American Colleges & Universities (n.d.), "[Liberal education] helps students develop . . . strong intellectual and practical skills that span all major fields of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving

skills; and the demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings"
(para. 5). While the approach to liberal education aligns with the skills and abilities
employers are demanding, missing is the specific avenue in which students are required
to demonstrate their acquired knowledge and skills. Some colleges and universities
might require an internship, a practicum, or another form of practical experience such as
project-based learning or service learning; in other schools, only certain majors such as
business or health sciences, may gain real-world experience while in college.

**Purpose of the Study**

Currently, leadership education is commonly seen in schools of business, which
focus more on management, or in graduate schools of education, specific for
administrative positions. Leadership education is often taught in silos at colleges and
universities, if offered at all. Even more rarely seen is an interdisciplinary leadership
program or curricula for undergraduates. According to Brungardt (1996), "Although
leadership has always been an indirect goal of higher education, it has only been recently
that colleges and universities have made major efforts in that direction" (p. 88). If liberal
education is indirectly concerned with leadership education, but has not been previously a
high priority, the effect of a direct focus on leadership development and subsequently
career success is unknown. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the
impact of leadership education on job readiness in undergraduate students.

*Theoretical framework of the study.* The four major theories in curriculum and
instruction include essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, and social
reconstructionism. The theory used to ground this study was progressivism. The aim of
the progressive theory in education is to enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and

decision-making skills in students as they become members of society. Students are the focus of progressivism, as opposed to the teacher and the subject (Dewey, 1986; Mosier, 1952). For students majoring in public health, the coursework and objectives were created in light of the global society in which public health professionals are now immersed in the twenty-first century. Also, the social ecological approach agrees with the curricular focus on economic and political affairs due to the impact of the environment and community on individual behavior. Methods of instruction commonly used in the curriculum are community-based learning, dialogues, case studies, and real-world applications. These methodologies align with the tenets of leadership education and subsequently the skillset needed in prosperous careers.

In addition to the progressivist theory of education, there are theories that orient job readiness and career development. A sample of the most common theories of career development include Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Holland's Career Typology Theory, Krumboltz's Happenstance Learning Theory, Super's Life-Span Theory, and the Trait-Factor Theory (Bandura, 1986; Betz, Fitzgerald, & Hill, 1989; Holland & Gottfredson, 1976; Krumboltz, 2009; Super, 1980). These theories emphasize the importance of variables such as traits, life stage, environment, genetics, and learned experiences on career development.

In an attempt to better understand issues of life and career choice, I am utilizing the framework of Krumboltz's Happenstance Learning Theory. This approach is an "attempt to explain how and why individuals follow their different paths through life and to describe how counselors can facilitate that process" (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 135). The influences and experiences that combine and overlap to create each unique person include

genetics, learned experiences from self and others, environmental factors, social networks, and educational settings.  If these variables work synergistically to form a student's behavior, then the question arises of how they influence job readiness.

To ground the question of how behavior affects job readiness, the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) created by Albert Bandura (1986), proposes a relationship between a person and his or her behavior and subsequently the outcome.  Mediating this process is a person's self-efficacy, defined as "beliefs about personal ability to perform behaviors that bring desired outcomes" (McAlister, Perry, & Parcel, 2008, p. 171).  To increase self-efficacy, Bandura identified four methods:  "(1) mastery experience, (2) social modeling, (3) improving physical and emotional states, and (4) verbal persuasion" (McAlister et al., 2008, p. 177).  Through the concepts of the Social Cognitive Theory, increasing self-efficacy around job readiness may impact behavior and outcomes.

Regarding leadership education, the study was set within the theory of the Relational Leadership Model (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, 2013).  The Relational Leadership Model describes leadership as being inclusive, ethical, and empowering, while being centered around a common purpose.  According to Komives et al. (2013), leadership is defined as "a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change" (p. 33).  Since public health is a person-centered field and works significantly with diverse populations, the Relational Leadership Model was chosen as the leadership theory to ground this study.

An educational setting that provides an opportunity for students to explore topics that have an impact on society and their ability to make change may subsequently have an influence on career development and job readiness.  In this study, leadership education

was explored surrounding a students' perception of job readiness, potentially through the improvement of self-efficacy. Questions regarding self-efficacy and the methods of increasing self-efficacy were investigated, as well as perceptions of job readiness both before and after the course. Since students were recruited from a semester-long course, there was an opportunity to see how perceptions changed over time.

*Conceptual framework.* Leadership is a word that has many definitions, but for most purposes, it can be described as an individual inspiring others to reach a shared goal. Additionally, while the role of leadership is important, equally so is the role of followership (Gardner, 1995; Kelley, 1995; Rost, 1995). Careers in the field of public health are not completed in isolation; therefore, working with a team will be required and group dynamics will need to be assessed. Leadership education explores areas such as understanding oneself and others, working with teams and group dynamics, understanding organizational and community leadership, analyzing values and ethics, displaying cultural competence, and navigating change.

Within the field of public health leadership, a community and systems thinking approach is essential. According to Rowitz (2014), "Public health leadership includes a commitment to the community and the values for which it stands" (p. 5). In order to effectively learn and apply these topics, students are required to showcase the skills of communication, problem-solving, and decision-making. The concept of leadership education and its relationship to employers' desired skills led to the question of whether including leadership education in the curriculum influences perceived job readiness in undergraduate students.

**Significance of the Study**

As an educator and advisor in public health at the undergraduate level, it has been interesting to witness the change in students from first-year enrollment to graduation. During this time, students often become more confident in who they are and more focused on their future goals. As students begin thinking and preparing for their future, they tend to fall into one of three categories:  planning to enroll immediately in graduate school, heading straight into the workforce, or intending to work for a few years with future aspirations to attend graduate school.  Regardless of which three direction students choose, consistent feelings of nervousness and panic often emerge regarding their preparation for and confidence in that decision.

The most common place these emotions have been observed is in the capstone course, PUBH 498:  Public Health Capstone Seminar.  Students take this course in their graduating semester, and its purpose is to help bridge the gap between college and career. At the beginning of the semester, they begin by completing self-reflections on their future plans to narrow in on a site to complete their capstone project.  Additionally, skills such as resume development, interviewing, and networking are discussed.  As the instructor, the assumption is that students are excited about the opportunity to work outside the classroom, but more often the students are paralyzed by their concern of not being able to find a project or be successful at their location.

In college, students are exposed to a wide variety of subjects and topics, and should be moving beyond rote memorization that displays knowledge and comprehension.  According to Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, students should be moving up the ladder to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.  For perceived job readiness,

these higher-order learning skills must be applied back to oneself.  As shown by their self-reflection writing assignments, this is not an easy task.  In order for students to feel prepared for their next step after finishing their undergraduate degree, they must have self-efficacy in the skills needed by employers.

**Research Questions**

This study's primary research question was, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students?"  The research question was qualitative and remained open-ended, as the study allowed for the possibility of leadership education having a positive impact on job readiness, a negative impact on job readiness, or no impact on job readiness.  Additionally, the research question did not specify the strength of the impact.

In addition to the overall impact of leadership education on perceived job readiness, the action research study also investigated the impact on diverse students. Students from diverse backgrounds such as under-represented races and ethnicities, non-Protestant religious affiliations, female and transgender populations, and non-heterosexual orientation were of special interest in this study due to their unique challenges and cycle of oppression in the educational system and in future workplaces (Young, 2013).  This study explored differences in experiences and outcomes of leadership education for students from diverse backgrounds.  Therefore, the study's secondary research question was, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in diverse undergraduate student populations?"  The research questions were studied through the use of the exploratory case study design methodology in qualitative research.

While the study was not grounded within one particular leadership theory or approach, the overall definition utilized was that leadership is "a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change" (Komives et al., 2013, p. 33). Undergraduate students were deemed the most appropriate population for the study, as this population is still in the career decision making process. Additionally, the specific population of public health students in the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course has an interest in learning about leadership studies and gaining leadership skills by choosing to enroll in this course. However, the students are less likely to have had significant leadership education experience before taking the course, unless they are pursuing an interdisciplinary minor in Leadership Studies. By selecting this particular population to study, the impact of leadership education could be examined more closely. Through this study, I hope to determine what, if any, impact leadership education has on the perception of job readiness in undergraduate students.

**Methodology**

*Participant selection.* With this study utilizing a qualitative action research design, participants were students in the classroom setting. Since the students could not be assigned to a specific class, the research design was not experimental in focus. Participants were students enrolled in the PUBH 499: Foundations of Public Health Leadership course, as this provided the optimum setting to implement leadership education. Participants were currently enrolled undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree, and could be a mixture of Public Health majors and Leadership Studies minor students. Students in the course are generally upper-level students in their junior or senior year, and may also be taking the capstone seminar simultaneously with

the public health leadership course. All fourteen ($n=14$) students enrolled in the course were deemed eligible for the study.

The study protocol was approved by the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) and deemed to be not human subjects research for educational purposes. Students were informed of the purpose of the study in the classroom and were given the option to opt out if they did not want to participate. Additionally, students were ensured that their choice of whether to participation would not impact their grade in the course. No students opted out from participation in the research study. The data collection process was completed over one academic semester, or approximately three and a half months.

*Research site.* Research was conducted at a large southeastern liberal-arts research university with an accredited school of public health. The school of public health enrolls 1,806 undergraduate students with a composition of 27% male and 73% female students. Students can choose between three undergraduate degree programs within the school of public health: (a) Bachelor of Arts in Public Health, (b) Bachelor of Science in Public Health, (c) or Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science.

Data was collected in the Foundations of Public Health Leadership classroom over the course of one academic semester. In addition to the university classroom, my office was utilized for qualitative interviews during office hours. Participants were students already enrolled in the course with knowledge of the objectives for the course, improving ecological validity of the study. Students in the course were informed of the research study during class at the beginning of the academic semester.

*Sources of data collection.* The sources of data collection for this action research study included traditional qualitative research sources such as open-ended questionnaires,

semi-structured and unstructured interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and observational data. Based on the conceptual framework of the study, the data collection sources assessed job readiness through two theoretical models. The Krumboltz Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) identifies various influences on behavior through avenues such as genetics, social networks, and educational settings. Krumboltz (2009) notes key areas for assessment in education by noting that what students do after school is equally as important as what they accomplish during their educational career. Specific goals of education identified include student's curiosity about the world around them, time spent thinking critically, ability to problem solve in the workplace, creation of health and wellness habits, and eagerness to learn (Krumboltz, 2009). These key goals were addressed in this study, through both the leadership education course content and student perceptions.

By utilizing components of the Krumboltz Happenstance Learning Theory, an assessment of what comprises the person identified in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory can be better understood (Bandura, 1986; Krumboltz, 2009). The Social Cognitive Theory is relevant to this study through the concept of self-efficacy and its connection to student perceptions (Bandura, 1986). Through the lens of both the Krumboltz Happenstance Learning Theory and the Social Cognitive Theory, the study aimed to examine the impact of leadership education on a person's perceptions of job readiness.

Interviews and focus groups were utilized to discuss the concepts of leadership education and job readiness through both directed and non-directed questions. Throughout the study, interviews and focus groups included semi-structured, unstructured, and informal formats. The interviews and focus groups took place both

inside the university classroom as well as in my office. Observational data was collected in the classroom environment. Collecting observational data can be challenging to obtain as the only teacher present, however the classroom environment of this study allowed for students to work alone and in groups at times, leaving me open to walk around and do observations. For example, when students were working in groups on public health case studies, I walked around to listen in on conversations and ask probing questions. Artifacts analyzed in the study included classroom assignments such as in-class activities, papers, and presentations completed by the students enrolled in the leadership course.

*Diversity and social justice component.* Supplementing the primary research question investigating perceptions of leadership education on job readiness in undergraduate students, a diversity and social justice component was also included in this study. An additional research question explored differences in experiences and outcomes of leadership education for students from diverse backgrounds. A significant component of leadership education is cross-cultural competency and multiculturalism, and the topics were discussed in-depth in the setting of the public health leadership classroom. In a global public health society, future public health leaders will be working with diverse populations, signifying a need for including multiculturalism in the curriculum (Cox, 1993; Cox & Beale, 1997; Cox & Blake, 1991).

In addition to the teaching of cross-cultural leadership, there are also significant differences in leadership styles based on cultural values and beliefs. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), these differences were analyzed by country and labeled as dimensions including power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, femininity vs. masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Artifacts such as student papers were analyzed

for concepts such as oppression and privilege in relationship to race and ethnicity, sex and gender, class, religion, and sexuality.

The literature review of this study provides a more in-depth exploration of populations and issues regarding diversity and social justice as it relates to both job readiness and leadership education. With the exploratory case study design, the themes and experiences emerged throughout the study based on responses to the questionnaires and the additional questions asked during the interviews and focus groups.  Student papers and presentations as artifacts were analyzed to look for themes in relationship to diversity and social justice.

**Limitations or Potential Weaknesses of the Study**

Utilizing the action research design methodology, the goal of the research study was to be informed of potential areas to improve instruction and ways to increase student learning.  Given that participants cannot be randomized to specific classrooms and the small sample size, there were limitations to the study's ability to be generalizable to the population of all undergraduate students.  Students opted to take the Foundations of Public Health Leadership because of personal or professional interest, but the goal was that the class be fairly representative of the undergraduate public health student population.

Beyond generalizability, there is also the potential weakness of studying student perceptions.  The study did not follow students into the workforce to see if leadership education has an impact on actual job readiness.  Students may also have had previous experiences beyond leadership education that influence job readiness that could be challenging to separate from the leadership course experience.

**Definition of Terms**

- *Action research* – This research study used Mertler's (2014) interpretation of action research, defined as: "Any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn" (p. 4).

- *Employability* – The term employability is used in this study with the meaning of "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (The University of Edinburgh, n.d., para. 1).

- *Followership* – According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), followership is defined as "the capacity or willingness to follow a leader" (para. 1). In this study, the definition of followership is taken a step further to mean "the willingness to cooperate in working towards the accomplishment of the group mission, to demonstrate a high degree of teamwork and to build cohesion among the group" (Holden Leadership Center, 2009, para. 5).

- *Job readiness* – In this study, job readiness was defined as being "based on what employers are looking for – are you ready for the kind of job you are looking for, and would an employer agree with this decision?" (The Working Centre, n.d., para. 3).

- *Leadership* – As stated by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), leadership is defined as "the office of position of a leader" (para. 1). In this study, leadership utilized the definition of "leadership as a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change" (Komives et al., 2013, p. 14).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, chapter one provided a summary of the topic, statement of the problem of practice, and the purpose of the study. The background rationale and significance of this study was described along with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Additionally, an overview of the study's methodology was explored including the research site, participation and selection process, and data collection procedures. Finally, a glossary of key terms defined was included.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Introduction**

During an undergraduate education, students are provided with ample

opportunities to increase knowledge and attitudes toward certain subjects or career paths.

While these two factors are essential to ensure success in the workforce, additional

requirements on the individual level are skills and abilities regarding job readiness. This

study sought to measure perceptions of knowledge, understanding, skills, and abilities

related to job readiness through the implementation of leadership education.

A review of the previous research on job readiness and leadership education must

be explored in order to ascertain past findings as well as limitations and gaps in the

research. For job readiness, the employers' and students' perceived views of job

readiness are uniquely important, as well as how readiness is assessed for the workforce.

Regarding leadership education, the various types of leadership development programs in

undergraduate education are explored as well as the previous research on undergraduate

leadership education curricula and programs.

**Leadership Education**

The initiation and significance of leadership education is explored in this section.

More specifically, this section begins with the evolution of leadership and the most

important eras throughout history for leadership studies. Next, the theoretical foundation

provides context for leadership education in comparison to the four major discourses of

education.  Following, an examination of the types of leadership education is explored.

Finally, the current research on undergraduate leadership education is reviewed including

the knowledge and skills gained, the teaching of leadership models, and pedagogies and

theories for developing leadership programs.

*The evolution of leadership.*  Leadership is more complex than influencing a

group of people to help achieve a single person's agenda.  True leadership is a

complicated and somewhat ambiguous process, culminated by a group of people who are

willing to sacrifice and work together to accomplish a mission set forth by the group as a

whole.  Without the involvement of many people in agreement with the set approach to

leadership, the likelihood of success is minimal at best.  However, to understand

leadership in modern society, an examination of the historical perspective of leadership is

necessary.

While the term leader has been around for centuries, the concept of leadership is

fairly new.  According to Bernard M. Bass (1995), "Although the *Oxford English*

*Dictionary* (1933) noted the appearance of the word 'leader' in the English language as

early as the year 1300, the word 'leadership' did not appear until the first half of the

nineteenth century in writings about the political influence and control of British

Parliament" (pp. 37-38).  Since the nineteenth century beginning of the concepts of

leadership, there has been a strong amount of disagreement on what is and is not

considered to be leadership.  History is filled with accounts of leaders and various styles

of leadership, some effective and others found to be ineffective.

The evolution of leadership theories began in the twentieth century and continues

today.  The history of leadership research can be divided into several eras.  Each era

differs by the prevailing opinions and definitions of effective leaders. Day and Antonakis (2012) divide the history into nine schools of leadership, ranging from the 1900s to present day. The periods include "trait, behavioral, contingency, contextual, skeptics, relational, new leadership, information-processing, and biological/evolutionary" (Day & Antonakis, 2012, p. 7). The nine schools of leadership are described below in chronological order; however, there are some periods of overlapping duration.

The trait era occurred primarily between the early twentieth century until the 1940s, sparked by the belief of certain traits that people were born with that made them effective leaders. The trait era was marked by personality testing to determine differences between leaders and followers, in search of ideal traits and characteristics (Chemers, 1995). While this form of leadership was very inactive in the 1960s and 1970s, the trait era has reemerged since the 1990s (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

The behavioral era, which was most popular between the 1940s to 1960s, grew at the same time as the popularity of behaviorism in psychology. Studies were conducted to compare various leadership styles for effectiveness, such as high leader decision-making, high group decision-making, and low leader involvement. According to Chemers (1995), "Here the emphasis was to move away from the focus on the internal state of leadership . . . to the more basic question of what it is that leaders actually do" (p. 85). The behavioral school has been mostly inactive since the 1980s (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

The contingency era, which dates from the 1960s to the turn of the twenty-first century, indicates that leadership is highly variable and cannot be based solely on either personality traits or style. According to Day and Antonakis (2012), this school is marked by the ideas "that leader–member relations, task structure, and the position power of the

leader determine the effectiveness of the type of leadership exercised" (p. 9). While the contingency period remained moderately active until present day, this school of thought has been mostly inactive for the past five to ten years (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

The contextual school, which is a broad area that encompasses other schools such as relational and new leadership, started in the 1960s and has been highly popular since the 1990s until today. The contextual school of thought emphasizes that certain factors influence the display or restraint of leadership behaviors. Examples can include gender, hierarchy, culture, and elements in the organization. More research is currently needed regarding the contextual school (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

The skeptics school of leadership, which was very popular from the 1960s through the 1980s, was a time when the personality tests and surveys of leadership were brought into question. Contributors to this school of thought believed that leaders were taking credit for successes and results that were not within the leader's control. Mostly due to further research, this era has mostly dissolved, although there has been an emergence of interest in followership and its relationship to leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

The relational school of leadership, which emerged in the 1970s, has fluctuated up and down in its activity, but is currently widely supported. This school of thought focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers. One of the most popular theories to emerge from this era is the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. According to the LMX theory, Day and Antonakis (2012) state that:

> High-quality relations between a leader and his or her followers (i.e., the "in
> group") are based on trust and mutual respect, whereas low-quality relations

between a leader and his or her followers (i.e., the "out group") are based on the

fulfillment of contractual obligations. (p. 9)

The relational school has grown in interest surrounding the role of followers, similar to

the last string of the skeptic's school.

One of the more recognizable schools of thought is the new leadership school,

also known as neo-charismatic, transformational, and visionary. The new leadership era

started in the 1970s and continues today. The hallmarks of the new leadership school

include transformational leadership, which built on the earlier idea of transactional

leadership. Transformational leadership is described as a form of leadership "in which

idealized and inspiring leader behaviors induced followers to transcend their interests for

that of the greater good" (Day & Antonakis, 2012, p. 11). During this time, a new vision

of leadership was formed, built around the idea of ethics, charisma, and authenticity. As

stated by Bill George (2003), the former CEO of Medtronic, "We need authentic leaders,

people of the highest integrity, committed to building enduring organizations" (p. 5). The

new leadership school has been the most popular paradigm, with the highest number of

research articles citing ideas from this approach (Angawi, 2012; Bass & Avolio, 1993;

Day & Antonakis, 2012; House & Shamir, 1993).

The information-processing school of leadership emerged in the 1980s and is

currently very active today. According to Day and Antonakis (2012):

The focus of the work has mostly been on understanding how and why a leader is

legitimized (i.e., accorded influence) through the process of matching his or her

personal characteristics (i.e., personality traits) with the proto-typical expectations

that followers have of a leader. (pp. 10-11).

Cognition and emotions are important to the study of the information-processing school of leadership, which also has influences on the contextual school of leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

The final and newest school of leadership, the biological and evolutionary era, only started in the current decade and is therefore still growing. This school of thought, while having small similarities to the trait theory, is focused on studying how certain biological variables can produce favorable evolutionary advantages. While still emerging, this area is interested in studying the impact of hormones and behavioral genetics (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

While the history and beginnings of leadership are significant to understanding how the modern leadership theories have evolved, the primary focus of this literature review, as it pertains to leadership education for undergraduate students, is on the more contemporary theories. Schools of thought most commonly seen throughout the scope of this literature include the trait, contextual, relational, and new leadership theories including neo-charismatic, transformational, and visionary theories.

*Theoretical foundation.* While there are many leadership theories that are discussed in further detail regarding undergraduate leadership education, I have chosen not to center the approach to leadership within any one theoretical framework. The method of exploring the concept for this study was a leadership education course that highlighted many different theories and frameworks throughout the semester-long class. While leadership education is the venue for exploring student professional growth in this study, the actual theoretical foundation for understanding the process involves issues of college student progression, retention, and engagement. These issues are critical for all

student populations in the study and are particularly meaningful in studying diverse student populations.

*Types of leadership education.* It is important to investigate where future leaders learn the skills and obtain the knowledge on how to be effective leaders. According to Riggio, Ciulla, and Sorenson (2003), there are approximately one thousand distinct higher education programs on leadership education. At times used synonymously, a distinction should be made between leadership education and leadership development. While leadership development is a lifetime learning process driven primarily by experience, leadership education is the "learning activities and educational environments that are intended to enhance and foster leadership abilities" (Brungardt, 1996, p. 83).

In *The Future of Leadership Development,* Riggio et al. (2003) describe three different types of models or philosophies motivating leadership education programs. The first model is business-driven, with a stronger focus on management and organizational psychology. The second model is more diverse, and centers on values and social responsibility as it relates to being citizens from a multidisciplinary perspective. According to Riggio et al. (2003), this form of leadership education program "increas[es] students' potential for developing into leaders through a combination of classroom learning and social and civic engagement via service learning" (p. 227). The third model is from a liberal arts perspective, and highlights the need for a broad curriculum when teaching leadership (Riggio et al., 2003).

The current research on undergraduate leadership programs explores various aspects of leadership education and its impact on undergraduate students. In the next section of the literature review, I will explore the knowledge and skills improved through

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leadership education as well as the impact of teaching leadership models. Finally, pedagogies and theories for developing leadership education programs are addressed.

*Knowledge and skills from leadership education.* While some studies focus on pedagogy, others assess the change in knowledge and skills. In a study by Blackwell and Cummins (2007), the researchers assessed students' perception of their leadership skills in eight different areas after a semester-long leadership course. The eight skills were broken into four practical skills, "including problem definition, discovery of research alternatives, delegation/teamwork, and achievable challenge" and four adaptive skills, "which are ability to focus on an issue, direct attention to detail, management of time and resources (including human resources), and persistence" (Blackwell & Cummins, 2007, p. 43). Following the leadership course, students perceived an increase in the eight previously identified skills (Blackwell & Cummins, 2007).

Another skill identified as critical for effective leadership is reflection, which can influence future action. According to Roberts (2008):

The ability to reflect, however, is not necessarily an inherent attribute, but it must

be cultivated over time, and unless one is actively engaged in the practice of

reflection, it is doubtful that this capability will develop on its own. (p. 126)

In an effort to investigate how to teach and increase student reflection, Roberts (2008) found that class discussion and establishing meaningful connections were stronger than written reflections. Interestingly, while reflection is a valuable skill for leaders and therefore is a potential area to focus on in leadership education, Stedman, Rutherford, and Roberts (2006) found no significant leadership skill difference in students who received teacher feedback on their reflective writing and those who did not.

A qualitative study analyzed the leadership goals of nearly 100 undergraduate students enrolled in a multi-year leadership certificate program at a Midwestern institution as part of their Personal Development Plan (PDP) (Rosch, Boyd, & Duran, 2014). Each goal was 100-200 words long and was subsequently coded by the researchers with the use of inter-coder reliability. The purpose of the analysis of the leadership goals was to investigate whether significant similarities or differences existed based on gender and racial identity. The results found that over half of the goals were coded as a skill, about one-third as a trait, and the remaining as a behavior. Significant differences were found by gender, and with further analysis it was identified that Caucasian females were significantly more likely to identify a trait as their leadership goal than Caucasian males. However, there were no significant differences in students' leadership goals by race (Rosch et al., 2014).

Soria, Snyder, and Reinhard (2015) conducted a survey of nearly 6,000 college students with senior standing to assess how higher education impacts multicultural competence and civic engagement of its students. Additionally, the study investigated how these impacts may in turn develop integrative leadership in students. The authors define integrative leadership as "the ability to bring diverse groups and organizations together to resolve complex problems and elicit lasting social change" (Soria, Snyder, & Reinhard, 2015, p. 56). The study found that female students as well as students identifying as Black, Hispanic, or Latino had significant increases in integrative leadership. However, first-generation college students had less growth in comparison to non-first generation college students. The study also found a significant positive relationship between the college impacting multicultural competence as well as civic

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engagement and integrative leadership in students. The authors of this study showcase the impact of leadership education on ethnically diverse students as well as students' overall ability to work with diverse groups in society (Soria et al., 2015).

Another significant consideration when teaching leadership education is whether knowledge and comprehension is retained over time. A study tested the knowledge of thirteen leadership competencies retained one, two, and three years after a college leadership course and "concluded that any experienced leader who completed an introductory leadership course as a sophomore can retain certain leadership competencies" (Williams, Townsend, & Linder, 2005, p. 69).

In addition to assessing the change in knowledge and skills post-leadership education, understanding the perceptions and beliefs of incoming college students may provide useful information as well. In a study by Fischer, Overland, and Adams (2010), the researchers found that incoming male college students were more likely to believe in hierarchical forms of leadership whereas females were more likely to believe in systemic leadership styles and processes. A mixed-methods study in college students found significant differences by gender regarding understanding of leadership, stating that "women includ[ed] a focus on collaboration, admirable personal qualities, and positive change more so than men" (Haber, 2012, p. 34). In addition to gender differences, LGBT students, ethnically diverse, and first generation college students were found to score higher on assessments of openness to change than other comparison peer groups (Dugan & Komives, 2007). In the same study by Dugan and Komives (2007), males scored higher on openness to change than females. Understanding the potential diverse

differences that may exist may influence the process and content of leadership education in undergraduate students.

*Teaching leadership models.* Previous research has found that teaching specific leadership models has increased knowledge and skills in undergraduate students (Stedman & Andenoro, 2007). More specifically, Stedman and Andenoro (2007) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and critical thinking. Stedman and Andenoro (2007) concluded that prompting scenarios that evoke emotional intelligence may enhance critical thinking, an essential job readiness skill. Also, a study on teaching teamwork found that student knowledge and skills on teamwork increased post-evaluation, but attitudes and self-efficacy regarding teamwork had not changed (Chen, Donahue, & Klimoski, 2004).

Similarly, a quasi-experiment was conducted in a semester-long course with a project based on the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM) (Buschlen & Dvorak, 2011). The goal of the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM) is to develop values across three dimensions: individual, group, and community (Buschlen & Dvorak, 2011). Seven values such as citizenship, collaboration, and commitment are targeted to increase leadership development. The Socially Responsible Leadership Scale was used as a pre-test/post-test evaluation and found that students in the experimental group improved on skill-based knowledge regarding the Social Change Model (Buschlen & Dvorak, 2011). Regarding the Social Change Model, Dugan and Komives (2007) found that "engaging in discussions about socio-cultural issues was the single strongest environmental predictor of growth across the Social Change Model values as well as self-efficacy in leadership" (p. 15).

Another study on the Social Change Model by Dugan and Komives (2010)

provides data regarding implementation of the model on leadership development in

college students.  The population included nearly 15,000 college seniors from 50

institutions.  The social change model includes eight outcome measures including:

consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose,

controversy with civility, citizenship, and change.  The survey instrument utilized in the

study asked questions about college experiences, the social change outcome measures,

and leadership self-efficacy.  The results found that student engagement in socio-cultural

peer conversations had a significant impact on all eight outcome measures of the social

change model, which indicates socially responsible leadership.  Additional positive

predictors for socially responsible leadership include faculty mentoring and involvement

in community service.  This study brings to light the importance of including cross-

cultural leadership in leadership education curricula.  Additionally, the cross-cultural

leadership components should aim to increase more than knowledge by simply teaching

facts, but hands-on application and involvement in the diversity curriculum (Dugan &

Komives, 2010).

McCormick and Tanguma (2007) found significant differences in students'

leadership self-efficacy following leadership training.  Interestingly, the treatment group

participants who scored low on leadership self-efficacy pretest had a significant increase

posttest, however those with high pretest scores displayed decreased leadership self-

efficacy posttest.  According to McCormick and Tanguma (2007), "the training

experience dampened these trainees' initial overconfidence, which in the long run may be

to their benefit, since leader arrogance has frequently been associated with leader ineffectiveness" (p. 120).

At the University of Arizona, students completed a Social Change Project that included service-learning and social justice components embedded within an introductory level leadership course (Seemiller, 2006). The addition of service learning has been found to increase student empathy, self-efficacy, and moral integrity. The course uses the Social Change Model and the Relational Leadership Model to teach leadership studies. Results showed that students who completed the course were more interested in performing community service and had increased knowledge of social justice and privilege (Seemiller, 2006). The Relational Leadership Model is the theoretical framework behind the *Exploring Leadership* textbook by Komives et al. (2013) which was the required textbook for the course in this study.

A study focusing on multicultural leadership provides an example of how this form of leadership education can be taught in an undergraduate setting. Fine (2015) embeds the topic within social construction theory, which promotes cross-cultural competence. According to Fine (2015), social construction theory includes "how individuals have a particular lens through which they view the world, and how they interpret and react to what is viewed through this lens is contingent on society and culture" (p. 210). Through active learning, the exercise incorporated in the classroom involved students identifying three objects that represent human culture and sending them to an extraterrestrial life species that has been supposedly discovered. Students select a variety of objects relating to technology, religion, essential needs of survival, and cultural icons. Then a discussion occurs around whether those objects relate to people in different

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regions of the United States or world as well as assumptions that the students are making about this new species. The activity is meant to showcase ethnocentrism that exists within the students' choices and how to better work with others. This article and example of an in-class activity on multicultural leadership is significant because cross-cultural leadership was one of the key topics in the leadership education curriculum implemented in my action research study. This article provides a way to teach cross-cultural leadership that highlights social construction theory and combats negative ethnocentric viewpoints (Fine, 2015).

In a culturally relevant study by Torock (2008), the researcher used the television show *Grey's Anatomy* to teach students about leadership and specifically the situational leadership model. By inserting a contemporary media element with which many students are familiar, application can be more exciting along with increasing student knowledge about different leadership models and styles.

Outside of specialized leadership courses, some schools have developed programs that incorporate coursework as well as other components to increase knowledge and skills. At the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, students are accepted into an undergraduate program called the Chancellor's Leadership Class, which includes "community service, skill building, and mentoring" in addition to leadership coursework (Hackman, Kirlin, & Tharp, 2004, p. 72). According to Hackman et al. (2004), "CLC's structure and prescriptive leadership model appear to be impacting students positively and facilitating noticeable growth in students' leadership skills and sense of self-efficacy" (p. 79). At Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia, their President's Leadership Program provides outside the classroom experiences in "experiential learning,

leadership development and student success" alongside an academic minor in leadership studies (President's Leadership Program, n.d., p. 1).

In addition to within the classroom education, opportunities beyond the classroom such as service learning have been found to impact leadership education as well as knowledge and skill attainment. According to Sessa, Matos, and Hopkins (2009), first-year college students in a leadership course were taught leadership theories, such as situational and team leadership, while also completing service-learning. The researchers found that service-learning enhanced the students' understanding and abilities to apply leadership concepts and theories taught in the classroom (Sessa et al., 2009).

*Pedagogies and theories for developing leadership programs.* More broadly, previous research on undergraduate leadership education programs has found certain pedagogies and theories beneficial for developing leadership programs. In order to provide strategies to build leadership education curricula, the notion that leadership can be taught and learned must first be accepted. According to Bridgeforth (2005), "academic preparation is contributing to the challenges experienced in both the practice of leadership and the advancement of research" (p. 17). More specifically, leadership education curricula must create a distinction between leadership and management.

In a study by Jenkins (2012), the researcher studied instructional strategies most commonly utilized in leadership education courses. While common themes were found surrounding individual and team-based projects, self-assessments, and reflection assignments, the hallmark of leadership education was class discussion (Jenkins, 2012). Affirming Jenkins' findings, Odom (2015) found class discussion to be the pedagogy referenced most commonly when students assessed the overall effectiveness of a

leadership course.  Similarly, Williams and McClure (2010) found public pedagogy to be a stronger method of student knowledge retention in leadership education over lecture and even experiential learning.

By interviewing individuals from successful leadership programs in higher education, Eich (2008) found sixteen characteristics of high-quality programs clustered into three categories:  "(a) participants engaged in building and sustaining a learning community; (b) student-centered experiential learning experiences; and (c) research-grounded continuous program development" (p. 176).  The need for leadership education in undergraduate students was also recognized in the field of nursing.  Six colleges and universities came together to identify strategies for leadership education.  Common practices included leadership simulations, observations, self-assessments, and flipped classrooms (Wisconsin Center for Nursing, 2014).

Research supports a strong relationship between leadership studies and liberal education.  According to Colvin (2003), "interweaving the behavioral and affective elements of leadership among courses in various disciplines is a key element to integrating leadership studies in a curriculum" (p. 33).  Proposals for incorporating leadership studies into liberal education included implementing a foundational leadership course in the first-year or second-year undergraduate curriculum as well as team leadership opportunities for juniors and seniors.  Additionally, a leadership course within the student's major was proposed with the culmination of a course on leadership integration (Colvin, 2003).

The Hosford model was utilized in the development of one leadership education curriculum, which "suggests a strong interrelationship exists between any given

curriculum program and the subsequent teaching involved in the program" (Watt, 2003, p. 16).  The model has eight dimensions which were applied to the leadership curriculum: professional considerations, practicality, political climate, package, organization, interrelated dynamics, teaching/learning considerations, and implementation. Additionally, Watt (2003) determined that the leadership curriculum should address student understanding, ability to synthesize and analyze, and application of leadership studies.  The curriculum suggests an interdisciplinary approach to both theory and pedagogy.  An important objective of Watt's curriculum is to address both leadership and followership as well as how to interact within the two effectively.

At the University of Florida, students majoring in Communications and Leadership Development enroll in a capstone course during their senior year that includes "career preparation, event planning, and other professional skills," which correlates to various skills needed for job readiness (Gifford, Cannon, Stedman, & Telg, 2011, p. 104). Based on the university's findings, the most significant recommendation for successful capstone courses in leadership included being flexible to course revisions based on student feedback (Gifford et al., 2011).

While not a curricular component of a specific degree program, the office of Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) at Georgia Tech provides one-on-one coaching programs for students to help improve their leadership skills, called Leading Edge.  Undergraduate students are paired with coaches, often doctoral students, who provide mentorship and feedback through assessments such as a 360-degree leadership assessment.  The program goals include improvement in areas such as communication, collaboration, and adaptability (Georgia Tech Division of Student Life, n.d.).

While many schools have various types of leadership programs, it was previously unknown whether the programs were similar amongst the different educational institutions. Faculty members at Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas conducted a review of the schools which offer an undergraduate major in leadership (Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, & Arensdorf, 2006). While all types of colleges and universities offered leadership degree programs, the majority were structured within smaller private schools. The review found a substantial difference between the schools in regards to the home academic department as well as number of courses. Schools varied in their leadership focus, with some schools focusing on the individual's leadership process and others on the collective whole. Somewhat surprisingly, very few schools included service-learning components in their curriculum, whereas the majority had some type of practicum or internship. However, in terms of similarity, most of the degree programs emphasized both the teaching of theory as well as application (Brungardt et al., 2006).

While the implementation of leadership degree programs has the potential for positive student outcomes, the sustainability of the programs is in question. In the analysis of a particular liberal arts leadership degree program at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, faculty and researchers stated that "we are exploring a better integration of the leadership program with management to respond to the work-readiness that university programs are under pressure to deliver" (McLaren, McGowan, Gerhardt, Diallo, & Saeed, 2013, p. 13). Combining a liberal arts leadership program with a business-oriented management program has strong potential for changing the leadership framework and pedagogy. If sustainability of a stand-alone program is not feasible, then it may be possible to integrate leadership education within individual

degree programs, such as public health, and still sustain the central liberal arts components.

In addition to sustainability, the process of outcomes assessment for leadership education programs has the potential for issues. Rosch and Schwartz (2009) identified five distinct potential issues for assessment. The first issue, identified as the Honeymoon Effect, is an exaggeration of the program's impact directly after the course. The Horizon Effect is a decrease in the validity of pre and posttests because of inaccuracies in students' perception after the course. The third problem, known as the Hollywood Effect, is when students assess themselves higher on competencies that they see as "socially desirable" (Rosch and Schwartz, 2009, p. 181). The Halo Effect is when an outside observer notes a high score or ability in one area, they may mistakenly score them higher in other areas. The final issue, the Hallmark Effect, is when students lower their own evaluations because they do not perceive themselves as leaders. Fortunately, Rosch and Schwartz (2009) provide strategies to minimize the problems and biases, such as providing multiple opportunities for assessment and incorporating 360-degree feedback assessments.

From the earlier research on undergraduate leadership education, best practices have been discovered for developing full programs and curricula as well as increasing knowledge and skills more specifically. While prior research is critical to the understanding of leadership education today, a gap remains in the translation to the workforce. Further research is needed on the relationship between leadership education and job readiness in undergraduate students, as this paper's research question proposes.

**Job Readiness**

In this section on job readiness, first the theoretical framework for job readiness and career development is discussed. Next, the perception of both employers and students is studied in detail along with the perceptions of recent graduates. The university's response to job readiness is comprised of various strategies and educational methods that have been implemented to address job readiness. Finally, in addition to perceptions and action steps to improve job readiness, how to adequately assess job readiness is investigated, with the review of several scales and measures spanning multiple decades.

*Theoretical foundation.* In addition to a theoretical framework for leadership education, there are theories that orient job readiness and career development. A sample of the most common theories of career development include Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Holland's Career Typology Theory, Krumboltz's Happenstance Learning Theory, Super's Life-Span Theory, and the Trait-Factor Theory (Bandura, 1986; Betz, Fitzgerald, & Hill, 1989; Holland & Gottfredson, 1976; Krumboltz, 2009; Super, 1980). These theories emphasize the importance of variables such as traits, life stage, environment, genetics, and learned experiences on career development.

The theoretical framework of Krumboltz's Happenstance Learning Theory is an "attempt to explain how and why individuals follow their different paths through life and to describe how counselors can facilitate that process" (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 135). The influences and experiences that combine and overlap to create each unique person include genetics, learned experiences from self and others, environmental factors, social

networks, and educational settings. If these variables work synergistically to form a student's behavior, then the question arises of how they influence job readiness.

To ground the question of how behavior affects job readiness, the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) created by Albert Bandura (1986), proposes a relationship between a person and his or her behavior and subsequently the outcome. Mediating this process is a person's self-efficacy, defined as "beliefs about personal ability to perform behaviors that bring desired outcomes" (McAlister, Perry, & Parcel, 2008, p. 171). To increase self-efficacy, Bandura identified four methods: "(1) mastery experience, (2) social modeling, (3) improving physical and emotional states, and (4) verbal persuasion" (McAlister et al., 2008, p. 177). Through the concepts of the Social Cognitive Theory, increasing self-efficacy around job readiness may impact behavior and outcomes.

More specifically on the topic of job readiness, Oakes (1990) discusses the lack of representation of women and ethnically diverse students in science and mathematics careers. As women and underrepresented populations go into the workforce in increasing numbers, the percentage of women and ethnically diverse students entering math and science jobs has not increased proportionately. In addition to a disproportionate percentage of women and ethnically diverse students in STEM jobs, they earn less overall than males in the dominant group. Oakes (1990) conducted a review of the literature on potential factors that may have an impact on career choice in female and ethnically diverse populations. Her review finds correlations between affective factors, such as attitude, along with prior achievements that may influence career choice. This article has significance to this current study because of the sample population of the action research study, university students majoring in public health, which is considered under the

science and health professions umbrella. The literature authored by Oakes provides data and potential factors that may influence student career choice and job readiness.

Regarding career development, Morrison (1996) provides background information as well as implementable plans on how to create leadership diversity in organizations. The data cited in the text is based on interviews with nearly 200 managers who work for institutions and organizations that are at the forefront of diversity in leadership. The book discusses the disparities that exist in leadership coinciding with the increase in diversity within the American population. Additionally, Morrison's text highlights the benefits of gender and ethnic diversity on the success of organizations. In addition to increasing knowledge, the book provides strategies for how to develop a diversity plan. The text has relevance to the topic of leadership education and job readiness because it showcases the additional challenges that students from diverse backgrounds may have entering the workforce and gaining leadership positions even with leadership education, which may act as a confounding factor. Additionally, the book indicates a need for cross cultural leadership education in the leadership education curriculum, as it will be pertinent for success in the workplace.

*Employer perceived view of job readiness.* In today's society, an employee must possess a certain set of skills to be successful in the workplace. While some skills are relative to the specific job requirements and description, others are universally required among all positions. Most employers are looking for a balance of experience and academics, focusing more on the specific skill set. Currently, employers are concerned with employees possessing communication skills, problem-solving, analytical reasoning, teamwork, and decision-making skills (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; The Chronicle of

Higher Education, 2012).  Additionally, the University of Glasgow found through

employers that graduates need skills in self-management, literacy, initiative, and

leadership skills (Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011).  However, when surveyed on

how colleges are doing at preparing students, employers answered that colleges are not

preparing students to make decisions or communicate orally and in writing.  On areas of

improvement, employers stated that college graduates should conduct better research on

the company or industry where they are pursuing work, and better interviewing skills

(The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012).

Employers have even started providing their own training programs to help recent

graduates attain the skills they need to be successful in the workplace (Bell, 2014).  In

addition to implementing their own training curricula, employers are providing insight

into what they believe impacts a student's ability to be work ready.  Employers view

beyond the classroom involvement as opportunities to build job readiness skills, such as

taking on leadership roles in clubs and organizations as well as completing internships

during their college careers.  According to Selingo (2015), "The best preparation for

today's job market is a mix of classroom learning that can be applied in real-world

experiences, or a combination of academic experience and practical experience" (para.

13).

Additionally, The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the

Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management

(2006) conducted a study on the nation's workforce readiness for graduating high school,

two-year college, and four-year college students.  While students graduating with a

bachelor's degree were found to be more prepared than two-year college or high school

graduates, there were still several areas of deficiency.  Areas of improvement most noted included four-year college graduates being considered "deficient in Writing in English and Written Communications," and deficient in "Leadership," both skills employers noted as very important (p. 11).  According to employers, "there [is] a mismatch between the needs of the economy and the structure and focus of many of the degrees offered" (Lowden et al., 2011, p. 15).

While studies are showing that college graduates may not be prepared for the workforce, it warrants the question of the outcomes based on this lack of preparedness. College graduates typically spend a little over a year at their first job, and even less than a year if they change companies.  Gardner (2000) discovered the top five reasons graduates are terminated from their first job includes:  a) "lack of initiative/motivation," b) "failure to be at work on time/attendance," c) "failure to follow instructions," d) "poor interpersonal skills," and e) "lack of teamwork skills" (p. 6).

*Student perceived view of job readiness.*  While the viewpoint and opinion of employers is critical to the workforce, the student's perception is also essential to understanding and improving job readiness.  According to Kavanagh and Drennan (2008), students are taking notice of the skills needed in the twenty-first century workforce.  However, in agreement with employers, students do not believe that colleges and universities are preparing them adequately for these requirements (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008).  Additionally, students are "focused on ongoing development of personal skills such as professional attitude, self-motivation, leadership and the ability to work in a team" (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008, p. 295).

While students may be in agreement with employers regarding some areas of job readiness, there are significant differences in perceptions of their own skills and abilities and how they should be reflected in the workforce, specifically through salary. When surveying undergraduates and employers on salary expectations of jobs with experience required and jobs without experience required, undergraduates expected higher salaries than employers in both categories. According to Wye and Lim (2009), "Although the difference is small, it does, to certain extent, show that undergraduates nowadays over-estimate their ability as fresh graduates in getting higher salary, thus feeling uncomfortable to receive anything lower than their expectation" (p. 98). In regards to specific skills, students rated themselves highly competent in "showing their punctuality, willingness to learn, and integrity and honesty" and that the universities are doing an average job of preparing them for the workforce (Wye & Lim, 2009, p. 98). However, there was a discrepancy between employer and student perceptions of the importance of skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communication. Wye and Lim (2009) note that making courses at the university level more practical and hands-on with case studies and real-world scenarios may improve student perception of importance regarding these skills and requirements in the workforce.

In another study, over four hundred business undergraduate students participated in a survey to uncover their views on employability and job readiness. According to Tymon (2013):

Despite ongoing debate about whether they can and should, most higher education institutions include the development of employability skills within their curricula. However, employers continue to report that graduates are not ready for the world

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of work, and lack some of the most basic skills needed for successful

employment. (p. 841).

Based on the current trends, Tymon (2013) placed a strong emphasis on student

perceptions. Students in all years of undergraduate education believed that employability

was important and noted the activities in the curriculum to help with job readiness skills,

such as presentations and group work. Interestingly, the students did not note their

extracurricular activities such as clubs and organizations as potential venues to build job

readiness skills (Tymon, 2013).

However, some reports are finding that student and employer perceptions are

strikingly different regarding job readiness and skills. According to Jaschik (2015), in his

summary of this year's report from the American Association of Colleges and

Universities (AACU), stated that "in a number of key areas (oral communication, written

communication, critical thinking, being creative), students are more than twice as likely

as employers to think that students are being well-prepared" (para. 4). In another survey,

almost eighty percent of current undergraduate students rated themselves as either

completely proficient or very proficient in organization. However, only fifty-four percent

of employers provided the same ratings regarding new graduates (Big Think, 2013, para.

4).

Similarly, students and employers have varying opinions on the impact of study

abroad experiences on job readiness skills. According to the Center for International

Mobility (2014), over sixty percent of students "saw international skills and competences

to be a personal asset in their working lives" (p. 18). Strikingly different, "only 36.5% of

employers gave weight to skills and competences developed through international

experience" (Center for International Mobility, 2014, p. 18). In the same research, employers valued reliability, problem solving, and communication as the important skills needed in the workforce (Center for International Mobility, 2014).

In addition to current student perceptions, alumni can provide a unique perspective on their perceived job readiness. In a survey of undergraduate psychology alumni, participants noted that responsibility and self-discipline were the skills referred to most as needed in the workplace. The alumni also provided suggestions on college activities to address these skills and qualities needed, such as group projects to improve working with other people, having writing projects in each course to improve written communication skills, and not accepting late work to enhance dependability and self-discipline (Landrum, Hettich, & Wilner, 2010).

At the University of Plymouth in the United Kingdom, the geography program made revisions to their curriculum to provide students with the skills employers are seeking (Gedye, Fender, & Chalkley, 2004). A study was conducted with two cohorts, one of current undergraduate students and the other comprised of recent graduates to identify the current needs and how the curriculum could be improved. Overwhelmingly with both cohorts, participants stated that the primary reason for seeking an undergraduate degree was to increase their job opportunities. However, the current and former students did not indicate skill development as a primary reason for higher education, even though this is precisely what employers desire. According to Gedye et al. (2004), "Whether or not undergraduates fully appreciate the link between enhanced career prospects and transferable skills is questionable, but certainly they do not see the acquisition of transferable skills as a goal in itself" (p. 391). Specifically for alumni,

respondents stated that they did not feel prepared for oral communication skills such as presentations as well as leadership skills and how to search for jobs (Gedye et al., 2004).

In a survey of recent engineering graduates, alumni noted the impact of project-based learning on their success in the workforce (Jollands, Jolly, & Molyneaux, 2012).  A major struggle for new employees was project management, for which project-based learning was identified as being a positive influence.  While a hallmark of project-based learning is problem solving, and recent graduates noted that they needed it on their job, none of the interviewed participants referenced project-based learning as helping to improve their problem solving skills.  Both recent graduates and their employers reported weaknesses in technical writing, which specifies an area for improvement (Jollands et al., 2012).

*University response to job readiness.*  An article in the Wall Street Journal, titled, "Why Aren't Companies Getting Graduates with the Skills They Need?" discusses the disconnect between education and employment.  According to Erickson (2013), "But just as elementary- and secondary-school learning standards are not well aligned with college expectations, neither are college curricula fully aligned with workforce needs" (para 2).  The issue that arises is how to teach skills in an evolving society.  In a panel with both employers and educators, the discussion determined that with the constant advancement of technology, it becomes nearly impossible to stay up-to-date (Morris, 2014).  At the panel discussion, the president and CEO of Kelly Services, Inc., Carl Camden, stated "What we're not doing with the students we're graduating…is training people how to keep themselves continually skilled and trained" (Morris, 2014, para. 7).  Fortunately,

higher education institutions are now noticing the workforce changes and the potential need for curricular changes.

The University of Luton in Luton, England determined that students need employability skills such as "the retrieval and handling of information; communication and presentation; planning and problem solving; and social development and interaction" (Fallows & Steven, 2000, p. 75). In order to teach these skills, the university undertook an initiative to embed these skills within the overall school curriculum (Fallows & Steven, 2000).

Certain undergraduate opportunities, such as undergraduate research, may provide students with opportunities to improve job readiness post-graduation. According to Hunter, Laursen, & Seymour (2007), students ranked career preparation as the sixth most significant takeaway from undergraduate research, noting the "real-world work experience" (p. 62). Additionally, a peer advising model for undergraduate public health students resulted in student peer advisors reporting increased interpersonal communication and presentation skills which are important for the workforce (Griffin, DiFulvio, & Gerber, 2015). At St. John's University in New York, their website promotes student employment as a pathway to gain job readiness skills (St. John's University, n.d.)

A study on the impact of problem-based learning on specific employability skills in undergraduate sport and exercise science students found that students had a significant increase in intrinsic motivation and a non-significant increase in internal locus of control and self-esteem, all of which may increase success in the workforce. Additionally, the students reported that the problem-based learning improved communication skills and

ability to work in teams, and they noted the importance of these skills in jobs (Martin, West, & Bill, 2008).

Another tool assessed for its impact on job readiness is the E-portfolio.  The E-portfolio, similar to a website, is described as "a repository management system that facilitates collecting, sharing, and presenting artifacts of student learning outcomes via a digital medium" (Tubaishat, 2015, p. 198).  The study had over two hundred students as participants and they noted that the E-portfolio was very helpful to showcase their employability and job readiness in the information technology industry (Tubaishat, 2015).

At Florida International University, faculty discovered that students with specialized degrees in marketing might not have an advantage in marketing jobs, as employers were more interested in specific skill sets such as the communication, presentation, and critical thinking skills discussed previously.  To address these specific skill areas, faculty developed an additional two-course series on marketing tools, which focused on the skills needed to be successful in the workforce (Taylor, 2003).  The series incorporated topics such as resume development, business dress code, salary negotiations, etiquette, networking, and communication skills.  Instead of utilizing a solely lecture-style teaching method, the course used mostly hands-on individual or team projects and class discussions, in addition to some short lectures.  In order to successfully implement these teaching methods, the maximum class size was forty students.  A potential limitation to the class size is the feasibility of implementation at large universities and in majors with a high number of students.  Results of the study showed

that students enjoyed the course as well as perceived an increase in skills essential for job readiness (Taylor, 2003).

In addition to specific skills, progression and retention issues at the university level also may have a significant impact on a students' ability to be ready for the workforce. A study by Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell (2011) focused on attitudes and behaviors of faculty and staff at higher education institutions that had a positive impact on high-risk students. The population included 62 undergraduate students identified as high-risk who are currently successful students and persisting. High-risk was defined as having "entered college as high-risk students by virtue of their admission test scores, their conditional admission, their placement in remedial courses, or a designation by their institution as 'high risk'" (Schreiner et al., 2011, p. 324). The students were first interviewed and asked to name who on campus had the most significant influence and why. Secondly, the faculty and staff were then interviewed to learn best practices and what steps they take to positively impact student success. In order to be ready for entrance into the workforce, students must persist to graduation. Using the action research methodology in one's own classroom, understanding the factors that impact persistence in high-risk students may influence the leadership education curriculum and ultimately job readiness in students.

Earlier research by Cummins (1986) discusses the potential reasons why diverse student populations continue to have progression and retention issues in education, despite previous interventions. The author introduces a theoretical framework to explain the continued disparity in educational attainment in under-represented students. The author surmises that previous interventions have failed because they do not address

improvement in the relationship between the student and teacher as well as the relationship between the school and the diverse population in the community. Cummins' (1986) theoretical framework suggests that the role of the educator within the school context requires empowerment in areas such as cultural and linguistic incorporation, collaboration with the community, interactive pedagogy, and advocating for students in assessments. This article and theoretical framework has significance because it addresses racial and ethnic diversity in its relationship to school success, which can ultimately influence job readiness. Additionally, it provides a framework from which to consider in the leadership education curriculum that has the potential to empower diverse students in the school setting.

Another study by Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin (2002) examined the impact of student engagement and experiences with diverse peers at their institution on educational and civic outcomes. The sample of this study included survey results from two datasets, one from the University of Michigan with nearly 1,500 participants and another from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) with over 11,000 participants. Relevant independent variables in the survey instrument include faculty emphasis on diversity, institutional emphasis on diversity, informal diverse interactions, and classroom diversity. Dependent variables included outcomes such as academic skills, intellectual engagement and motivation, citizenship engagement, perspective-taking, and racial and cultural engagement. The results found that there was a positive relationship between diversity experiences and both learning and democracy outcomes. This study has significant relevance based on its research on outcomes related to both learning and democracy. Leadership education that focuses on diversity experiences may have a

positive impact on both student learning as well as job readiness through democracy outcomes.

*Assessing job readiness.* In a review titled "Employability in the Undergraduate Curriculum: Some Student Perspectives," Yorke (2004) stated that "The development of employability is a shared responsibility, with institutions, students and employers to the fore" (p. 424). In addition to understanding the perceptions of both employer and student, determining ways to assess job readiness is of high significance. A variety of instruments and scales exist to assess job readiness, including perceived and actual, for different populations (Arbona et al., 2014; Sampson, Peterson, Reardon, & Lenz, 2000). For perceived job readiness, instruments such as the Career Decision Diagnostic Assessment assess orientation toward luck and fate, authority, motivation, goals, and decision anxiety (Bansberg & Sklare, 1986). The Career Factors Inventory contains scales on indecisiveness and career choice anxiety (Chartrand, Robins, & Morrill, 1997). Regarding self-efficacy, the Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale assesses the employee's belief that he or she is capable of being successful at the job (Betz & Hackett, 1981).

A study by Mau (2004) utilized a questionnaire, known as the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire, to look for differences by ethnicity regarding career decision-making difficulties. Mau (2004) had two sample populations for the study, 361 high school students and 513 college students. The study found that Asian American students had the highest rate of career decision-making difficulties compared to other ethnicities both before the decision-making process, identified as lack of readiness, and during the decision-making process, identified as lack of information and inconsistent information. The author noted that cultural values, such as a collectivist culture in Asian

American students, might be a mediating factor (Mau, 2004).  This study is significant because of the relationship between career decision-making and job readiness.

Another aspect of job readiness is the ability to work with others and in interdisciplinary teams (Parsell & Bligh, 1999).  A questionnaire was developed to assess student readiness for interprofessional learning, specifically in health care.  The participants were second-year students in eight varying clinical professions:  "medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy, nursing, occupational therapy, orthoptics and both therapy and diagnostic radiography" (Parsell & Bligh, 1999, p. 96).  While this study included a mixture of both undergraduate and graduate students, the health care interests are similar and may provide valuable information for assessing teamwork for students interested in clinical care.  The preliminary study found internal consistency reliability and high content validity of the scale and a causal relationship between "readiness for shared learning" and skills needed on the job (Parsell & Blight, 1999, p. 99).

A more recently developed scale of self-perceived employability was studied for reliability, determining that the sixteen-item scale has adequate internal reliability (Rothwell, Herbert, & Rothwell, 2007).  Interestingly, there was a strong correlation between scores on self-perceived employability with university commitment and ambition.  Further research is needed to determine the extent of the relationship between those measures (Rothwell et al., 2007).

ETS, the Educational Testing Service, which houses a large number of the most common standardized tests for undergraduate and graduate school admissions, is aware of the new needs regarding job readiness in the workforce.  Dating back to the turn of the century, ETS has created "The Job Readiness and 21st Century Skills Initiative," which

has a three-pronged approach to address these issues: identify, assess, and improve. According to the ETS (n.d.b), the objectives of the initiative are to: "Identify the critical skills necessary for success in today's job market; develop methods to assess those skills; and provide information to guide current and future employees worldwide to improve their job skills" (para. 2). ETS is utilizing the Five-Factor Model (FFM) to assess and compare personality traits with needs of the workplace. The five factors include "openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism" (Educational Testing Service, n.d.a, para. 3). The application of these results includes educational institutions and employers individualizing environments to promote success.

Finally, the Clifton StrengthsQuest assessment is an online survey tool assessing thirty-four areas of talent themes with the goal of helping people determine their strengths and skillsets (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2016). After completing the survey, participants receive a report of their top five talent themes as well as information on how their unique talents can be utilized in both their personal and career lives. Research on the Clifton StrengthsQuest assessment has found that people who align their work with their strengths are more engaged employees and have a higher quality of life (Clifton et al., 2016). The *Exploring Leadership* textbook by Komives et al. (2013) includes a free access code to complete the Clifton StrengthsQuest assessment online, and was the required text for the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course.

The previous research and methods of assessing job readiness were included to ground the approach for my research study. Based on the student population and the course goals, a few of the previous approaches were utilized throughout the semester to assess varying dimensions of perceived job readiness. The Clifton StrengthsQuest

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assessment was an assignment embedded into the Foundations of Public Health

Leadership course and explored further in a written assignment about self-leadership.  A

sample of questions from the self-perceived employability scale by Rothwell et al. (2007)

was used as class discussion.  Finally, the *Exploring Leadership* textbook and student

workbook included reflective writing on areas such as diversity and wellbeing that relate

to overall job readiness (Komives et al., 2013).

**Literature Review Summary**

The purpose of this literature review was to review the past research within the

scope of leadership education and job readiness.  Regarding leadership education, while

the various types of leadership education were broadly mentioned, the focus of the review

was on programs and curricula related primarily to undergraduate students.  As

undergraduate students were the target population of this research study, it was most

appropriate to focus on past research related to this group.  Similarly, the term job

readiness can be applied to students after finishing high school, college, or advanced

degree programs.  For the purpose of this study, the literature reviewed was limited to

studies related to students in undergraduate degree programs or seeking employment

shortly after graduation.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, chapter two reviewed the literature regarding the concepts of

leadership education and job readiness.  The beginnings and evolution of leadership was

described as well as the theoretical framework for this study.  The three main types of

leadership education were explored and undergraduate leadership education studies were

reviewed.  Within undergraduate leadership education, the knowledge and skills gained

from leadership education were explored as well as the influence of teaching specific leadership models. Finally, pedagogies and theories for developing leadership programs were investigated.

Next, job readiness was studied by first addressing the theoretical framework and then delving into different perceptions of job readiness to include the employer and student as well as university response to job readiness. Finally, methods of assessing job readiness were reviewed. In chapter three, the study methodology of the impact of leadership education on perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students is described in significant detail.

CHAPTER THREE

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Introduction**

The dissertation in practice (DiP) focuses on job readiness in undergraduate

students, more specifically the impact of leadership education on perceived job readiness.

The review of the literature assessed the theoretical foundation for job readiness as well

as perceived views of job readiness from the employer and student perspective.

Additionally, the university response to job readiness was reviewed as well as methods of

assessing readiness for the workforce.  Regarding leadership education, the review of the

literature provided an overview on the evolution of leadership as a field of study as well

as the various types of leadership education.  Since the target population is undergraduate

students, undergraduate leadership education programs were studied to identify

knowledge and skills attained from leadership education, various leadership models used

in instruction, as well as pedagogies and theories for developing leadership programs.

The action research design for this problem of practice was an exploratory case based

qualitative study.  Data was collected via open-ended surveys, interviews, focus groups,

artifacts, and observations.  Additional information regarding the research objectives and

research design follows.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of leadership education on

perceived job readiness among undergraduate students.  By investigating whether there is

a positive influence, negative influence, or no influence between leadership education and perceptions of job readiness, curricula might be more effectively transformed.

**Statement of the Problem of Practice (PoP)**

During an undergraduate college education, students are provided with ample opportunities to increase knowledge and attitudes toward certain subjects or career paths. While these two factors are essential to being successful in the workforce, additional requirements on the individual level are skills and abilities. This action research study sought to measure what relationship, if any, leadership education has on the perception of knowledge, skills, and abilities related to job readiness.

**Research Questions**

This study's primary research question was, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students?" The research question was qualitative and remains open-ended, as the study allowed for the possibility of leadership education having a positive impact on job readiness, a negative impact on job readiness, or no impact on job readiness. Additionally, the research question did not specify the strength of the impact. The research questions were studied through the use of the exploratory case study design methodology in qualitative research.

In order to answer this research question, the study first explored how undergraduate students currently feel about job readiness and career development. Secondly, the study investigated how leadership education relates to job readiness for undergraduate students. Additionally, the interplay of self-efficacy and its evolution throughout the course was explored. Finally, the qualitative study sought to discover

how leadership education impacts students' perception of knowledge, skills, and abilities toward job readiness.

In addition to the overall impact of leadership education on perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students, the action research study also investigated the impact specifically on diverse students. Students from diverse backgrounds such as ethnically diverse, non-Protestant religious affiliations, female and transgender populations, and non-heterosexual orientation were of special interest in this study due to their unique challenges and cycle of oppression in the educational system and in future workplaces (Young, 2013). Therefore, the study's secondary research question was, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in diverse undergraduate student populations?" However, a challenge in this action research study was the limited sample size of students from diverse backgrounds enrolled in the leadership course. Based on course enrollment, the study explored differences in experiences and outcomes of leadership education for students from diverse backgrounds represented in the sample population.

**Action Research Design**

*Research objectives.* The objectives related to leadership included examining areas such as the use of critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. More specifically, students learned to identify various leadership styles and traits as well as explain the role of leadership in the field of public health. Additionally, students applied leadership techniques to public health scenarios as well as assessed public health leadership through the use of case studies. Finally, students proposed a strategy for improving the field of public health utilizing specific leadership

approaches.  The objectives of the research were to test a learning strategy through the

use of lectures, discussions, and assignments to measure students' perceived job

readiness while reinforcing the required skills in public health leadership.

*Research design overview*.  When planning curricula for various fields, subjects,

and content areas, the role of key stakeholders is crucial for effective development and

implementation.  Students, teachers, administrators, and community members are all

critical pieces to the puzzle of curriculum design, each playing a different role in the

process.  The role teachers should play in curriculum planning is most essential, as they

are the in-house experts in their chosen field of study (Connelly & Ben-Peretz,

1980).  Teachers are the instructors who deliver the content to the students on a daily

basis, and therefore have a unique perspective that cannot be ascertained by only reading

scholarly work about the field.  As teachers grow to know their students and the thematic

elements, learning styles, and other preferences of their pupils, they can make changes

and additions that are tailored to student needs.  Competent instructors often change and

adapt their approach to various concepts, identifying what works with a certain

population of students and what falls through the cracks.  If teachers are left out of

curriculum planning, regulations and standards oftentimes go into effect that may not be

practical or necessary in the classroom (Elliott, 2006).

Based on the need for teacher involvement in both the classroom and research

processes, a new form of research has emerged in recent years, known as action research.

According to Mertler (2014), action research is defined as:

Any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or

others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment

for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools

operate, how they teach, and how their students learn. (p. 4)

Action research emphasizes the use of the teacher's classroom as the research site and the

students and teacher as participants. Additionally, the data collected and analyzed is used

to inform the individual teacher or administrator about how to better tailor curriculum

and instruction to meet the needs of his or her students. While the action research

process does not prioritize the ability to generalize the results of the study to all

populations, this does not keep the research from being systematic and having rigor.

Action research has four stages: planning, acting, developing, and reflecting,

which are further broken down into nine steps. Below lists the nine steps of action

research, as well as its corresponding stage:

- Step 1: Identifying and Limiting the Topic (Planning)

- Step 2: Gathering Information (Planning)

- Step 3: Reviewing the Related Literature (Planning)

- Step 4: Developing a Research Plan (Planning)

- Step 5: Implementing the Plan and Collecting Data (Acting)

- Step 6: Analyzing the Data (Acting)

- Step 7: Developing an Action Plan (Developing)

- Step 8: Sharing and Communicating the Results (Reflecting)

- Step 9: Reflecting on the Process (Reflecting) (Mertler, 2014, p. 37)

The research design described in this study followed the nine steps of action research to

investigate the impact of leadership education on perceptions of job readiness in

undergraduate students.

*Planning for action research.* Based on the action research process, planning for action research included three important steps: "(a) identifying and limiting the topic; (b) gathering information; and (c) reviewing the related literature" (Mertler, 2014, p. 39). The first step, identifying and limiting the topic, involved figuring out specifically what the researcher wants to study. Initially, I was broadly interested in the impact of leadership education on undergraduate students. As time progressed teaching my course, I began to notice the trend of students becoming anxious and feeling unprepared for their next step after college. This observation served as the motivation for developing the problem of practice.

The second step, gathering information, was an informal review of information on the topic. I discussed the idea with colleagues in the field and the curriculum currently used was also reviewed. Additionally, I reflected on experiences both within and beyond the classroom that informed the research topic. After additional information gathering, the connection was made between leadership education and job readiness, and the question surfaced: Would implementing leadership education in a public health course improve student perceptions of knowledge, understanding, skills, and abilities related to job readiness?

The third step, reviewing the related literature, included the more formal review of information regarding the research topic. For this study, a review of the previous research on job readiness and leadership education was completed in order to ascertain past findings as well as limitations and gaps in the research. For job readiness, the employers' and students' perceived views of job readiness were uniquely important. Additionally, I needed to better understand how job readiness is assessed for the

workforce.  Regarding leadership education, the various types of leadership development programs in undergraduate education were explored as well as the previous research on undergraduate leadership education curricula and programs.

From the earlier research on undergraduate leadership education, best practices have been discovered for developing full programs and curricula as well as increasing knowledge and skills more specifically.  While prior research is critical to the understanding of leadership education today, a gap remained in the translation to the workforce.  Further research is needed on the relationship between leadership education and job readiness in undergraduate students, particularly in the field of public health, as this study's research question proposed.

The fourth and final step of the planning stage is developing an action research plan.  This step included several key points including the research question, variables, methodological design, and ethical considerations.  For this study, the primary research question was:  What is the impact of leadership education on perceptions of job readiness among undergraduate students?  A secondary research question was:  How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in diverse undergraduate student populations?  The concepts important to the research questions were leadership education and job readiness.

*Methodological design.*  The purpose of applied research is to inform the public on findings that can be used in a particular field of interest.  In education, applied action research is most often discoveries and relationships found within the classroom that teachers can use to improve their own curriculum or instruction.  When conducting action research, utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods can help inform the research

question as well as the study's hypothesis, if applicable. For the purpose of understanding the relationship between concepts, a qualitative research design appeared to be the most natural fit for this study on the impact of leadership education on perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students. More specifically, a qualitative design that allows for data collection such as questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations allowed for the ability to make overall connections between the two concepts.

Additionally, in the proposed educational setting, it was not possible to assign students to specific classrooms; therefore, the sample population for the research study was students enrolled in my public health leadership course. The qualitative design utilized the exploratory case study method, with the purpose to "explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 548). The qualitative case study approach explored phenomenon through the lens of multiple data sources, as is described in most foundational case study data collection strategies (Yin, 2009). The research design was created to inform practice in my classroom, not to be generalized to other classrooms or populations.

In the development of an action research plan, it is important to further describe how leadership education was taught in the classroom setting. Foundations of Public Health Leadership, PUBH 499, provided an introduction to core principles in public health leadership. Topic areas included self-leadership, cross-cultural leadership, ethical leadership, community and organizational leadership, group dynamics, and navigating change as related to the field of public health. Students enrolled could earn course credit as a public health major, leadership studies minor, or as a general elective if they had a

specific interest in public health and/or leadership. Students were likely to be upperclassmen, although the course did not have specified prerequisites. With the demographic composition of the public health school, it was likely that course enrollment would be predominantly female. Additional demographic information such as racial and ethnic identity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status was collected from students at the beginning of the semester and is discussed further in chapter four.

The class format included a variety of experiences, including but not limited to: seminar-style classroom and discussions, case-based learning, collaborative activities and group projects, written assignments, and verbal presentations. The students reinforced the information covered in the course by the use of critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, reflection, verbal and written communication, and analytical reasoning. The class format was designed in a way to engage auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners.

In the leadership course, the required text was *Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference* (Komives et al., 2013). The course used the book's topics as an outline for the semester. The book is divided into four parts: Leadership for a Changing World, Exploring Your Potential for Leadership, Context for the Practice of Leadership, and Making a Difference with Leadership (Komives et al., 2013). In addition to the required text, students completed course readings such as three case studies, readings on conducting group projects, and additional readings on cross-cultural leadership, self-leadership, authentic leadership, and ethical leadership.

Beyond course readings, students in Foundations of Public Health Leadership completed three major course assignments.  The first assignment was a Self-Leadership paper, where students identified their own leadership style and traits as well as explored their own professional goals and how they can use their leadership skills for success in the workplace.  The second assignment, the Public Health Leader Paper, students evaluated and assessed the leadership style and traits of a past or present public health leader.  The third assignment, which was their final paper and project, had students working individually and as a team.  Students proposed a strategy for improving the field of public health utilizing specific leadership approaches, and the final product was an individual paper and a group presentation (see Appendix A for the course syllabus).  All course activities and assignments were analyzed to compliment data collected via interviews and focus group discussions.

*Ethical considerations.*  The final important step of developing an action research plan was the ethical considerations that cannot be ignored.  As with any form of research, the researcher must take into consideration whether the study methodology is ethical.  Additionally, in the case of applied action research, the purpose of the study should be to extract something meaningful and applicable to the educational field.  According to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) (2011) Code of Ethics, there are five key principles that should be maintained throughout research:  "professional competence; integrity; professional, scientific, and scholarly responsibility; respect for people's rights, dignity, and diversity; and social responsibility" (pp. 146-147).

For this particular study, the five principles were considered to identify any potential problems according to the Code of Ethics.  Regarding professional competence,

I received training on how to conduct and analyze research, passed human subjects training as required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), completed both Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) training, and successfully completed advanced coursework in qualitative and quantitative methods. Additionally, I selected a research topic within the scope of my professional competence and conducted the research within my own classroom. For integrity, I was honest and clear about the methods and purpose of the study with the participants before and after conducting the research. All students in the class were eligible to participate in the study, exemplifying fairness to participants.

In consideration of professional, scientific, and scholarly responsibility, I had colleagues review the instruments and methodology prior to implementation to ensure ethical behavior. The proposed research study was submitted to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and commentary. Subjects were informed that their answers on questionnaire data or personal information would remain confidential, and would not be shared with outside parties. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were created in the codebook and no names were used throughout the study results in chapter four. Considering respect for people's rights, dignity, and diversity, participants were not criticized or mistreated for their answers or their willingness or unwillingness to participate. Additionally, subjects were not treated or considered different due to ethnicity, race, religion, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. All students received informed consent at the beginning of the semester and were given the opportunity to opt-out of the study at any point during the research period. Students were informed of the purpose of the research,

its IRB approval as not human subjects research for educational purposes, and how their discussions and work would be utilized.  Students were informed that if they did not wish to participate in the study, their work and discussions would be excluded from data analysis.  Student grades were not impacted by results or participation in the study.

Following the last principle of social responsibility, I intend to use the results from the research study to inform the educational community both within my university and beyond.  Research findings may potentially be used to make changes or revisions to curricula, presented at conferences, and/or submitted to peer-reviewed publications.  Additionally, the qualitative action research study has the potential to highlight an area for further study.  Conducting ethical research was highly prioritized and continually reviewed throughout the study for any potential problems.

*Positionality.*  As a faculty member and public health professional who focuses on the relationship between socioeconomic disparities and subsequent health and educational attainment, I am driven to support an educational system that fosters empowerment and encourages leadership to drive future success.  Missing from the curriculum of many undergraduate public health academic programs is the cultivation of future leaders and demonstration of how to apply the knowledge and skills attained in the classroom into their future careers and lives.

My philosophy of teaching is to bridge that gap by developing and teaching programs and curricula that encourage students to learn beyond the lecture-based classroom.  I also seek to provide opportunities for growth and personal development through engaging learning experiences.  Through additional education in areas such as leadership education, service learning, civic education, and innovation, students will be

prepared for their future career roles and as members of society. Supplementary resources such as case-based learning, peer mentoring, instructional technology, and personalized learning can all be utilized in higher education to support and engender additional learning and overall academic success. Also, providing an outlet for inquiry, self-discovery, and service opportunities is crucial for students to find their career desires and aspirations.

The purpose for continuing graduate study in curriculum and instruction at the University of South Carolina was to explore and deepen research in the aforementioned and related areas in order to create effective and sustainable programs and curricula. My graduate education in public health from Columbia University, specializing in Sociomedical Sciences and Health Promotion Research and Practice, has provided me with the experience and expertise to create multi-level programs and interventions in education. With this dissertation in practice (DiP), I can apply this knowledge to curricula design, developing a leadership education curriculum with an ecological framework to measure perceptions of job readiness through increased knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and self-efficacy. As a teacher, my goal is to engage students by being a facilitator of their own learning.

**Procedure**

Data collection consisted of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and observations. A benefit of qualitative research design is the ability to be flexible regarding data collection techniques throughout the study. While I planned to use all methods described, there was also the opportunity to adjust questions and discussions based on phenomenon uncovered throughout the study. The qualitative design allowed

for a broader and more in-depth study of the concepts of leadership education and job readiness (see Appendix B for a list of data collection methods utilized and corresponding dates).

For the participants enrolled in the course, an open-ended questionnaire was administered in class assessing the idea of leadership and perceptions of job readiness (see Appendix C for the student questionnaire).  Based on the responses from the questionnaire, questions and themes to discuss were developed for subsequent semi-structured and unstructured interviews, informal focus groups, and artifacts.  Interviews and artifacts addressed topics such as leadership areas of interest, career goals, and feelings about entering the workforce.  Additionally, the focus groups and artifacts went into more discussion around diversity issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, and religion.

Throughout the span of the leadership course, class discussions around the concepts of leadership education and job readiness took place.  Interviews took place in my office and focus groups occurred in the classroom.  With a smaller class enrollment of fourteen students, I was able to hold a discussion about the concepts with the class as the focus group.  Artifacts consisted of papers, class activities, and presentations submitted by the students that were analyzed for themes consistent with leadership education and job readiness.  Finally, during class periods where students worked on case studies and other class activities, I took on the role as observer.

During data collection and analysis, student names and identifying information remained anonymous to protect their participation and responses in the study.  The data was stored in order to remain confidential, either on my password protected computer for electronic files or locked in my office for paper files.  Student assignments were

submitted through the university's learning management system, Blackboard, and are only accessible by me as the instructor.

**Data Analysis**

When analyzing qualitative data, an inductive approach is often used, starting from observations to potential theories (Trochim, 2006). Analyzing qualitative data from questionnaires, observations, interviews, and focus groups involved looking for patterns that provided valuable information related to the research question. The first step of data analysis was to code the data based on key terms and concepts. After the initial questionnaire was collected, the responses were analyzed for themes to develop questions and topics for the interviews and focus groups. Once all data had been collected, coded, and central themes had been developed, the data was analyzed for connections and emerging ideas in relationship to the research questions. In addition to similarities and connections, I also looked for where data conflicted with the research question, such as finding no relationship or impact between leadership education and job readiness perceptions. Because data collection involved class activities and assignments throughout the semester, data analysis was ongoing.

**Plan for Devising an Action Plan**

Action plans can be created on three different levels: individual, team, and school-level or district-wide. Individual action planning informs the educator as researcher of ways to improve the classroom and instruction (Mertler, 2014). For this study, based on the results, individual action planning could include implementing components of leadership education into other public health courses such as the Public Health Capstone Seminar in order to increase job readiness perceptions. Team action

planning includes working with colleagues who teach in the same area; therefore, the results of this study could potentially lead to all instructors of the Public Health Capstone Seminar adding leadership education into the curriculum.  A potential plan could also be to create a curriculum development workgroup, comprised of faculty interested in transforming their courses based on results of this study.

The process of action planning leads to the final step of reflecting on the overall process.  Reflective thinking requires the ability to think back and critically analyze a situation or event and determine the meaning and future applications.  In the field of education, an example of professional reflection may include a teacher thinking back on the previous test or examination given to his or her students, and determining whether or not the assignments or curricular materials should be improved.  Professional reflection can foster ideas and hypotheses for action research that can be tested in the classroom or throughout the school.  Subsequently, for action planning, the results can be used in the implementation phase to improve student learning and teacher instruction (Mertler, 2014).

According to Mertler (2014), there are two avenues in which teachers as researchers should participate in professional reflection during action research.  The first way, according to Mertler (2014), is that "Teacher-researchers should reflect on intended as well as unintended outcomes of the study for the purpose of planning future professional development" (p. 220).  For example, when teachers are beginning action research, they should spend time reflecting on what they plan to do with the results of the study and how it can improve their teaching and student learning.  The results of this study may suggest the need for further research on the topic, such as a quantitative

longitudinal study.  According to Breckler (2006), "Applied [research] is motivated more by a desire to solve practical problems and to move the fruits of our scientific labor into the real world" (p. 24).  If a research question does not have the potential to provide applicable results, the research may not be worth pursuing from an action research standpoint.  The intention of this research is to explore perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate public health students and how leadership education may contribute to these perceptions.

The second way that teacher researchers should conduct reflection is to, "also reflect on the action research study itself, focusing primarily on the methodology employed" (Mertler, 2014, p. 220).  By reflecting on the methodology used in the study, the teacher may ascertain if a revised approach or research design could potentially lead to different or more detailed results.  While reflection on the methodological design has been utilized for this current study, further reflection at the end of the study period was also warranted.  By reflecting on different methods to conduct research on the topic of leadership education and job readiness, new research questions to propose new studies were formulated.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, chapter three provided detail on the methodological design of this qualitative study on leadership education and job readiness.  A summary of the purpose and problem statement was provided as well as a description of the research questions and objectives.  The research design was outlined using the steps of action research design, including planning, development, data collection, data analysis, and action planning.  In the development of the action research plan, the methodological design was

illustrated along with ethical considerations and positionality.  Chapter four will focus on

the findings and interpretation of the study based on the qualitative data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS FROM THE DATA ANALYSIS

**Introduction**

The dissertation in practice (DiP) seeks to investigate the concept of job readiness in undergraduate students. More specifically, this action research study is studying the impact of leadership education on perceptions of job readiness among undergraduate public health students. The action research design for this problem of practice is an exploratory case study utilizing surveys, interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and observations as data collection sources. Previous research has shown that students are provided with significant opportunities to increase their knowledge and attitudes during an undergraduate education (Association of American Colleges & Universities, n.d.). However, there is a gap between the knowledge acquisition and application of skills, which is essential to success in the workplace. This study seeks to measure what relationship leadership education has with perceptions of job readiness, as measured by self-communicated growth in knowledge, skills, and abilities among undergraduate students. Chapter three outlined the action research methodology by describing the research method and design, procedure, and process for analysis. Chapter four will explore the findings of the study including the seven emergent themes and the interpretation of results.

**Research Question**

The primary research question of this study was, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students?" The research question for this qualitative study was open-ended, allowing for a range of possibilities including no impact, a positive impact, or a negative impact on job readiness. The study also investigated the impact on diverse students. Students from diverse backgrounds such as underrepresented ethnicities, non-Protestant religious affiliations, female and transgender populations, and non-heterosexual orientation were of special interest in this study due to their unique challenges and cycle of oppression in the educational system and in future workplaces (Young, 2013). The study's secondary research question was, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in diverse undergraduate student populations?" Without the ability to control course enrollment, the study explored differences in experiences for diverse students who chose to enroll in the course.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of leadership education on perceived job readiness in undergraduate students. As students enter the workforce after graduation, it is critical that they have not only the knowledge of their chosen field, but also the ability to put their knowledge into practice. Employers have noted deficiencies in employees regarding job readiness, and this study sought to determine what, if any, impact leadership education has on student perceptions of being ready to enter the workforce. By assessing perceptions of job readiness, the study took into account how undergraduate students currently feel about job readiness and the role of self-efficacy as well as the impact of leadership education. The impact of leadership education was

assessed through the lens of student perceptions regarding job readiness knowledge, skills, and abilities.

**Findings of the Study**

*Participants in the study.* Participants in the study were students enrolled in the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course during the spring 2017 academic semester. The sample size was a total of fourteen (*n*=14) undergraduate students. Twelve of the students were public health majors, pursuing either a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science in Public Health degree, which equaled 85.71% of the sample group. One student, or 7.14%, was pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science, which is also housed within the university's school of public health. One student, or 7.14%, was pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. Thirteen of the students identified as female (92.86%) and one student identified as male (7.14%). Eleven participants stated their racial and ethnic identity as White or Caucasian, which equaled 78.57% of the population. Within that group, one student (7.14%) also identified as Lebanese and one student (7.14%) also identified as Croatian and Irish. Two students, or 14.29%, identified Black or African American as their racial and ethnic identity. One student (7.14%) stated their racial and ethnic identity as Brown/Indian/Asian. All students (100.00%) in the sample provided straight or heterosexual as their sexual orientation. Ten students (71.42%) listed their religious affiliation as Christian or Catholic, two students (14.29%) as non-affiliated, one student (7.14%) as Hindu, and one student (7.14%) was not present during collection of this information. Regarding socioeconomic status, one student (7.14%) listed their status as lower middle class, seven students (50.00%) as middle class, four students (28.57%) as upper middle class, one

student (7.14%) as upper class, and one student (7.14%) was not present during collection of this information.

   *Data analysis.* After the data collection period was completed, all data was coded based on key terms, concepts, and themes. The student questionnaire, interviews, informal focus groups, artifacts collected throughout the semester, and classroom observations were all coded in order to be grouped into themes for analysis. Twelve codes were created before the data analysis process began in order to organize the data. The twelve original codes included: self-leadership (SL), leadership strengths (LS), leadership weaknesses (LW), leadership trait (LT), definition of leadership (LD), career goal (CG), public health concept (PHC), job readiness perceptions (JRP), job readiness strengths (JRS), job readiness weaknesses (JRW), leadership theory (LTY), and public health problem (PHP). During the coding process, three additional codes were created based on concepts that emerged throughout the analysis. The three additional codes included: leadership experience (LE), job readiness skills desired (JRSD), and self-identity (SI). The most prominent codes included leadership theory (LTY), career goal (CG), and job readiness skills desired (JRSD). One of the original themes, public health problem (PHP), was not utilized during the coding process.

   After the data was coded based on concepts and key terms, the coded data was grouped into themes for analysis. Seven themes emerged from the coded data:

   1. Identification and perception of job readiness skills

   2. Change in definition of leadership throughout course

   3. Interest in volunteer work and service learning

   4. Need for stress management for job readiness

5. Concern about others contributing in teamwork

6. Self-efficacy by knowing more about self-leadership

7. Gender and race impacts motivation behind career

Each of the seven themes will be explored in more detail based on excerpts from the various data sources. Most commonly, student responses will be quoted directly rather than being paraphrased in order to keep the original voice and prevent misinterpretation.

*Theme one: Identification and perception of job readiness skills.* At the beginning of the semester, students completed a short open-ended questionnaire that addressed preliminary ideas about the course, leadership, and job readiness. One of the questions stated, "Describe how prepared you currently feel to go into the workforce." Four students (28.57%) noted that they felt prepared, six students (42.86%) as somewhat prepared, and four students (28.57%) as unprepared. Several students chose to provide a numerical value in their response, as one stated:

Probably about 60%. I'm a sophomore, so I have some time left to be able to educate myself completely about PH [Public Health]. In terms of people skills, I'd say about 90%. I think I'm capable of communicating, organizing, accomplishing, etc.

Students who were unprepared noted deficiencies such as not networking enough, not having enough work experience, or needing more education.

The questionnaire then asked, "What concepts or skills obtained would make you feel more prepared to go into the workforce?" Students noted skills such as public speaking, interview skills, adaptability, organization and communication skills. One student noted, "My personal leadership style, patience, more knowledge of health care

field." Others believed that they would need to learn these job readiness skills in the workforce. A student stated, "I believe there are some skills that can only be learned in the workforce (and I don't really know what those are yet)." Another commented, "Obtaining teamwork and leadership skills that can only be obtained in the workplace." The students' early opinions that they could only learn job readiness skills once in the workforce was interesting, which led me to wonder later whether they do not believe college should be responsible for teaching these skills, or, if they believe the college is not adequately prepared to teach these skills.

As the semester continued, students wrote a three to five page self-leadership paper evaluating and assessing themselves as a leader, identifying the leadership theory that best describes their behavior, and exploring their personal career and educational goals. The concept of job readiness in terms of strengths, perceptions, and skills desired emerged many times throughout this artifact. According to one of the students:

> As I approach graduation I continue to feel anxious about my entrance into the workforce or higher education. I am worried that I will not be able to stand out as a leader in my next position because I will be so new on the scene and inconsequential to the system. Despite these fears, I am currently exploring numerous job opportunities and two graduate certificate programs.

Another student noted how her career goals were aligned with her personal strengths by stating, "In the professions of coaching and teaching, I will primarily use the servant-leadership approach to guide my actions. I will incorporate my leadership skills of inclusivity, communication, and determination to effectively help others reach their goals."

The concept of gender diversity was addressed as one student wrote:

> I am committed to serving the people 'below' me and to always try to find the
> best possible solutions for problems I am assigned to fix. I will continue to not
> expect recognition and assist those around me. As a woman, I will be able to
> remain headstrong and stick to my morals and values.

The student's verbiage was interesting, as she discussed her gender in relationship to her leadership style in the workforce, while also noting not to expect recognition.

Finally, the concept of teamwork was woven into a student's response as a skill needed in her career field. She stated, "Policy is a highly collaborative process, and my leadership-followership fluidity will provide me with the adaptability necessary for many of these projects at varying levels of influence."

At the end of the semester, an informal focus group discussion took place to debrief the course for the semester as well as talk about the topics of leadership education and job readiness. I asked, "How prepared do you currently feel to go into the workforce in comparison to the start of the semester." Several students spoke up noting that they feel like they have the skills, but are not sure how to "sell" them to employers. Two students agreed stating that they learn a lot in classes, but are not sure how to apply it. The conversation brought to light the problem of practice in this research study and the disconnect between knowledge and application. Practical experience such as an internship or practicum were noted by two students as being helpful for feeling ready to go into the workforce and the opportunity to try out a job to see if they like it. One of the students who felt unsure how to "sell" themselves to an employer also noted the fear of not being able to find a job after graduation.

The overall observation noted during the focus group was that students who were graduating in May were more concerned overall than those who were not as close to graduation. Many expressed that not having full-time work experience in public health was discouraging when looking at the job market. Overall, students perceive that communication skills and initiative are the skills that employers are looking for in recent graduates. During the focus group discussion, students indicated that they felt they have communication skills and initiative. They are unsure of how to get a job, not if they can do the work once they get there. Students attribute lack of practical experience in the public health field as a key driver for not being prepared for the workforce.

Students graduating mentioned the Public Health Capstone Seminar course as helpful for job readiness to get information on how to create a resume and the process of applying for jobs, but they did not feel the reflective writing assignments were as helpful. The reflective writing assignments cover topics such as individual strengths, skills they want to improve upon, and confidence in their knowledge of the public health degree competencies. Once students begin their community project, their reflective writing assignments are about their first impressions and challenges at their site, skills they have developed, and how they will face new challenges post-graduation. Based on student responses, it appears that less reflection and conceptual study is needed and more concrete forms of application should be included. These findings agree with previous research that reflective writing may be not perceived as helpful in comparison to other forms of pedagogy (Stedman et al., 2006; Roberts, 2008).

*Theme two: Change in definition of leadership throughout course*. In the initial questionnaire given to students at the beginning of the semester, one of the items asked,

"What does leadership mean to you?  What is your definition of leadership?"  Overall, students defined leadership as positive and many students initially discussed the concept of motivation in their definition.  One student discussed motivation and diversity by stating, "A leader is one who leads by example and motivates everyone to be better while still being respectful to those who are different."  Others identified traits such as being efficient and productive.  One student wrote, "Leadership means taking on a role to accomplish a task.  Along the way, a leader should be able to inspire, be inspired, [remain] calm, make a difference, restore/continue order, but also work harmoniously with people for a greater good/goal."  A couple of students included the use of control, such as the statement, "To me, leadership means being able to sway and instruct a group of people (or one person) to do something for a certain purpose."

Approximately one month into the course, students completed a self-leadership paper.  At this point in the semester, students had covered topics such as introduction to leadership, the relational leadership model, self-leadership, and cross-cultural leadership. In the self-leadership paper, students' definitions of leadership began to shift slightly toward the idea that leadership is not based on a certain position in an organization. According to one student, "…anyone and everyone is eligible and able to demonstrate different types of leadership regardless of how the responsibility was appointed." Another student wrote as part of her reflection on past experiences:

> What I didn't realize at the time, was that one didn't need to hold a title or act a certain way in order to be a leader.  It took some time, and I am still learning about my leadership style, but I realized that others may look to me for other reasons, like my work ethic or empathy towards others.

The importance of leadership in public health was discussed by a student stating, "Being a leader in public health is more than having people work for a superior to complete a common goal. It is people working together to improve the lives and health of people they have never met."

At the end of the semester, students wrote a ten to fifteen page paper identifying how they would improve the field of public health utilizing specific leadership approaches as well as their own strengths. By this point, their definition of leadership had expanded to include the concept of relationship between leadership and followership. A student wrote in her final paper:

> No one is excluded from the role of leadership; everyone is capable of assuming the role. Over time, the concept of leadership has evolved and now the relationship between leader and follower is more fluid. A leader can step down and a follower can step up as needed.

The need for teamwork between leaders and followers was addressed by a student stating,

> In order to make a positive change in the field of public health, leaders and followers will have to work together effectively. Leaders need to be intentional with their actions and words in order to advance the welfare and quality of life for all.

During the final class discussion of the semester, I asked students how their definition of leadership changed since the beginning of the semester. One of the students who participated less often in class spoke up and said that leadership was less formal than she expected. Others chimed in to say that they now believed that leadership does not require a title and is less formal. The comments that stood out the most were that after

taking this course and learning about leadership, they now believe that they are capable of being a leader.

Overall, students noted that their definition of leadership had changed since taking this course and their written artifacts agree with these statements.  Students' leadership definitions have evolved to not require a positional title in an organization, reduced formality necessary in leadership, and increased self-efficacy for being a leader.  Another important aspect is that students in this course had a variety of career goals, not just healthcare administration.  The participants' future career and educational goals included fields such as:  health policy analysis; WHO ambassador, coaching and counseling, health education and advocacy, health care administration, and epidemiology.  The diversity of career and educational aspirations is important because student interests expand beyond the traditional public health leadership field of healthcare administration.  This implies that more students are interested in and believe in the importance of leadership, which can be beneficial to the public health workforce.

*Theme three:  Interest in volunteer work and service learning.*  Throughout the course of the semester, students had a multitude of opportunities to discuss their previous experiences and future goals.  A common theme that emerged was how students identified volunteer work, service learning, and other informal leadership experiences as both a personal interest and an opportunity to gain job readiness skills.  In the self-leadership paper, one student wrote about her community service experience:

I am very involved in community service projects and activities in my spare time. During these projects, there is a lot of work that involves team building and

cultivates relationships between those volunteering.  Community service allows

me to develop leadership skills that encourage active participation from everyone.

Another student described her experience in athletics and how her informal leadership

experience was valuable to her teammates:

> My teammates admired my hard work and the underclassmen looked to me for
>
> guidance.  I even took a couple of the freshmen under my wing and was able to
>
> transfer my experiences with leadership from other sports to this new sport.  As a
>
> result, my determination to reach my full potential is an area that was new to me
>
> and encouraged the younger girls to work harder as well.

In one class session toward the end of the semester, students completed an activity

worksheet on well-being and health.  One of the sections had students create a "spiritual

development plan" based on engagement in various activities.  All students noted

volunteer work or service learning as a way in which they would like to develop and find

meaning and purpose.  According to one female student, "I am hoping my career will

allow me to maintain community outreach with organizations I respect and thrive to work

for.  This summer I will have more time to put into service learning and working with a

non-profit organization."  Another student noted how service learning, volunteering, and

study abroad were all critical to her future goals:

> I am going to be spending a month abroad in Costa Rica this summer on a global
>
> health trip.  I have already been involved in a service learning course at USC, and
>
> plan to continue to get involved in the community.

I found the students' overwhelming interest in volunteer work and service

learning to be both interesting and fitting for public health students, as it is a very hands-

on and interactive field that is person-centered.  This appears to be a leadership strength for public health students as they head into the workforce.

At the end of the semester, students completed their final paper on a strategy to improve the field of public health based on their own strengths, and their personal leadership experiences once again highlighted volunteer work and service.  One of the students talked about her clinical volunteer work by stating, "During my college career I worked with Healthy Columbia, a non-profit organization that holds health screenings throughout the community.  In this organization I was exposed to many public health leaders at the community level."  Another student who was graduating at the end of the semester reflected back on her time as a Resident Mentor for the university:

My past experiences also bring something special to the group.  In my

undergraduate career… I served as a Resident Mentor with University

Housing for three years.  The job gave me the chance to work with diverse

students from  around the country and even around the world.  I learned how

different my students and their backgrounds could be, even if at first glance

they appeared  to be a homogenous group.  I often had to assist in roommate

conflicts resolutions, and usually once we got students talking about what the

issue was, we learned that it often went much deeper than a few dirty dishes.

I used my trainings and leadership traits to help the students talk to one another

about what the real problem was and talk to each other about what they were

feeling in order to reach a resolution.

This student highlights several critical skills for job readiness based on her leadership experience as a Resident Mentor. Her ability to work with diverse populations, to communicate effectively, and to resolve conflict all attest to potential benefits of service.

Overall, students found volunteer work and service learning to be in line with their career goals and of personal interest. Many students reflected on their past experiences with volunteering and service as examples of their leadership. Finally, these previous experiences were often used as illustrations of their leadership strengths and contributed to their perceived job readiness.

*Theme four: Need for stress management for job readiness.* Originally discussed in the significance of the study, students in the Public Health Capstone Seminar were seen overtly stressed about going into the workforce or graduate school. In the informal focus group, students also displayed their fear of not being able to find a job or were unsure of how to sell their education and experience to an employer. While a normal amount of stress is not a cause for concern, students self-reported a significant amount of stress throughout the semester.

Students completed an activity worksheet on well-being and health. An open-ended question asked how much stress they current have in their lives. All fourteen students reported that they have either moderate or high stress currently. One student wrote, "My stress level is pretty high right now because of graduation and everything coming up." Another student stated, "I am usually always stressing about something. School, work, other people's stress, money. It's a normal emotion." I found this to be very interesting that all students believed they were currently under significant stress, and that many perceive this to be normal. Stress management may need to be a focus for job

readiness, as their stress is only likely to increase after completing their undergraduate education.

Students appear to be cognizant of stress in the workplace, as stress was a topic mentioned several times in the final paper. One student who is a semester away from graduating wrote:

The unpredictable nature of public health stresses the demand for workers that are able to react quickly and adapt to any situation that may emerge. While most people employed in this field are generally driven by a fundamental sense of mission, in order to be successful, they must be able to move beyond passion and step outside of their comfort zone. They must begin to develop tactical, intellectual leadership techniques that exceed the responsibility of a single organization.

While all students reported significant stress, one student discussed her perceived ability to work effectively during stressful times:

My leadership skills and strengths set a solid foundation not only for the proposed project, but for my future career aspirations as well. Primarily, I envision a future career in a public health-related discipline. My specific pathway to the public health field is slightly ambiguous at this point, although I have an interest in health care administration and health policy at this point in my academic career. I plan to earn a Master's Degree and potentially an MBA, which would showcase my unique skill set and combination of leadership strengths. After my graduate education, I see myself being ready to effectively manage stressful situations that can arise within the public health field.

Being able to effectively manage stress is an important skill for everyone at different periods throughout their lives.  The students in this course reported being under moderate or high stress currently.  They were also aware that stress will continue into the workforce.  However, it is unclear how effectively they deal with stress.  This highlights the potential need for stress management for effective job readiness.

*Theme five:  Concern about others contributing in teamwork.*  From the beginning of the semester, the course content introduced and students discussed the importance of teamwork in the public health workforce.  Since public health is not a field that works in isolation, it is critical that students have team skills.  The course included units on team-oriented topics such as cross-cultural leadership, group dynamics, community and organizational leadership, and understanding change.  Many students throughout the semester discussed their own teamwork strengths, recognized the strengths in others, and voiced their concerns over working in teams.

In the self-leadership papers written early in the semester, many students noted how their interaction with others contributed to their leadership experience.  According to a collegiate student athlete:

Most of my experience in leading other people has come from participating with student organizations and athletic teams.  As a child I played a variety of sports, some team-oriented, and some with a focus on individual performance…each required interaction with others who sought the same achievements as I did.  Even as I transitioned to more individualized sports such as track and cross country, teamwork and cohesiveness remained prerequisites for the team realizing a common goal and succeeding as a whole.

The importance of teamwork was one of the most common themes noted in the public health leader paper, a three to five page paper which required students to select a past or present public health leader and evaluate their leadership style and traits. One student wrote about the late Clara Barton, and discussed how she exemplified the situational contingency theory:

> Due to the extremity of violence and death of war, it is critical that people such as doctors, nurses, and other health specialists working together to form a team are also separated according to personal skills, needs, and motives defined by individual characteristics. The events that are carried out aren't necessarily predictable on the battlefield, and members of the team must be able to adapt quickly to change when it occurs.

Another student chose to write about Larry Brilliant and his global team that helped eradicate smallpox. According to this graduating senior:

> The team showed how to work together despite their personal and homeland differences during the Cold War. This is something we all can learn from as the world becomes more integrated and we need to work together more to solve some of the most challenging health and humanitarian problems.

About former President, Barack Obama, a student stated, "There are countless examples of his success, but from a leadership standpoint, the most important is to lead a group of people as a team."

At the beginning of the semester, students were introduced to the group project they would complete throughout the course, proposing a strategy to improve the field of public health. Students completed various assignments with their group as well as a

fifteen to twenty minute group presentation at the end of the semester. One group noted the importance of teamwork in their final presentation, "There are many qualities that are sought to be fitting and beneficial in the field of healthcare administration, a few being: Adaptive, independence, personable, approachable, effective, team player." In the final individual paper that corresponds to the group project, a student wrote about the importance of teamwork in public health. According to the graduating senior, "Public health is a team sport, and learning to collaborate early will help students perform in the future."

In addition to students' own personal teamwork strengths and recognizing the importance in the field of public health, students also discussed their concerns when working with others. At the end of the group project, students were asked to fill out a survey assessing how team members participated throughout the semester. One of the open-ended questions asked, "What worries you the most when working in groups?" Twelve out of the fourteen students, equaling 85.71%, wrote that they worried about everyone not contributing equally. A student wrote, "Not everyone participating and having to do the majority of the work. This has happened a lot, even when I attempt to delegate so it's a worry."

The biggest concern overall for students regarding the group project was everyone contributing equally or their "fair share." Additionally, they were concerned whether in groups everyone cares as much as they do about the quality of the work. One student wrote, "When working in groups I worry that group members will not put in the same quality of work that I am expecting of myself." Students will see these same issues arise again in the workforce, as they will rarely be working alone.

*Theme six:  Self-efficacy by knowing more about self-leadership.*  One of the first

units covered in the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course was the concept of

self-leadership and understanding yourself.  Students completed the Strengths Quest self-

assessment to uncover their five individual strengths (Clifton et al., 2002).  The

assessment provides students with five words, known as Signature Themes, which match

their strengths and a description of what each word means.  A common theme during a

class discussion was that when students were given the results with their five words, they

originally did not agree with the assessment.  However, once they read the descriptions of

what each word meant, they began to understand and agree with the results.  During a

corresponding class activity, students walked around the classroom to talk to their peers

and find students with overlapping Signature Themes.  Students reported that they

enjoyed talking with other students who had some of the same Signature Themes.  At the

same time, they noticed that no one had the exact five words matching their own

assessment, highlighting each student's individual strengths.

A few weeks after the unit on self-leadership, students submitted their self-

leadership papers.  While it was not mentioned explicitly in the assignment prompt, most

students discussed their Signature Themes and how those related to their leadership

strengths and traits.  Earlier in the semester, students learned about different theories of

leadership and how they have evolved over time.  In the self-leadership paper, students

were asked to explain the leadership theory that best describes them based on their past

and present actions.  The most commonly mentioned theories were the reciprocal

leadership theories, which includes:  servant leadership, transforming leadership,

complexity theory, adaptive leadership, and shared leadership. According to one of the graduating seniors about transforming leadership:

> Yet in transforming leadership there is also an emphasis on the leader growing as well. As a Changing Carolina Peer Leader, my main goal is to inform students across campus of all the health services we have at [the university] and then how to implement some habits for healthier lives.

Another student wrote about her alignment with the adaptive leadership theory:

> I think that the Adaptive Leadership theory is most applicable to me. Adaptive Leadership occurs when interacting individuals generate adaptive outcomes that are needed to accomplish a goal. Additionally, emotional intelligence and a strong sense of common values and goals are required. Again, I do see myself to be more of the adaptive type to maintain harmony and accomplish goals.

The most commonly mentioned reciprocal leadership theory, however, was servant leadership. According to a student athlete:

> I strongly identify with the servant-leadership approach, which states that leaders are driven to make a positive impact on others. This approach describes my behavior while mentoring and coaching. In both of these roles, the emphasis is on the people that I am leading. My end goal in these positions is for my mentees or athletes to grow and improve.

Similarly, at the end of the semester, students finalized their group project and completed their group presentation about their strategy to improve the field of public health. Three out of four groups (75.00%) grounded their strategy in a reciprocal leadership theory.

Throughout the semester, three of the class periods were dedicated to working on a major case study from the field of public health. Students had to work together in teams to conduct research, analyze data, and provide solutions to real public health problems. The case studies required the students to integrate what they had learned in other public health core courses such as epidemiology, health economics, health promotion, and environmental health and apply it to the specific case. At the same time, students were unknowingly demonstrating their own leadership strengths in a team setting. As the facilitator, I walked around the room making observations about how groups worked together. I noted that all students were highly engaged in the case study, in comparison to other in-class activities. Some students displayed their strength of being able to find information and research quickly online. Others helped to organize the group and take notes on the brainstorming of solutions. For each of the three case studies throughout the semester, students were mixed up in different groups. While some groups worked more seamlessly together than others, all were able to contribute significantly to the case.

During the informal focus group at the last class session, I asked students if there were certain topics, activities, or assignments that had an impact on how they felt about job readiness. Students frequently mentioned the self-assessments as important to their perceptions about job readiness. According to one student, "The self-assessments made me more confident that even if I do not know everything about the job, that I know myself and can be successful." The case studies were also heavily mentioned as helping them with real-world application of public health. Learning about the different theories and history of leadership were also mentioned, as it helped them know the origins of

leadership and the many different ways to be a leader.  Students also completed a short, individual, open-ended questionnaire that asked about their opinions on the course. During the final in-class informal written evaluation, I asked students what would be their key takeaways from this class.  Students overwhelmingly reported that they would take away more information about their own self-leadership that they can use in the workforce, and feel more confident about how to work with diverse populations.

*Theme seven:  Gender and race impacts motivation behind career.*  At the beginning of the course, students completed an introduction sheet for the instructor that asked for general contact information, future career and educational goals, and what they expected out of the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course.  Students reported a variety of career goals such as health policy analyst, health education specialist, project manager, epidemiologist, and hospital administrator.

During the course unit on cross-cultural leadership and understanding others, students completed an identity worksheet where they answered questions and reflected on their diversity.  The worksheet asked students to write about which aspects of their identity they think about most frequently.  Ten out of twelve females (83.33%) wrote about their gender as the part of their identity that is thought about most often.  The activity had no prompt regarding career or educational goals, but the students made very interesting connections in their reflection.  A white female student athlete who wants to become a health policy analyst wrote:

> I tend to be defiant to social norms and expectations especially regarding gender
> roles.  Because I am female and the discrepancy between male and female senior

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executives exists in my field, I tend to work harder and it inspires me to set goals specific to overcoming this deficit.

Another student who identifies as Caucasian and Lebanese and aspires to be a World Health Organization ambassador and a health education specialist stated, "I think about my identity as a female most frequently especially at a day in age where women fight for their rights every day, yet we are fortunate enough to receive a valuable education and job in this country."  One of the graduating seniors with goals to one day become a Physician Assistant wrote:

> Mostly I think about my gender because I feel like that has the biggest impact on me especially as I try to enter the workforce in a medical field.  I often get upset if I am not allowed to apply to a certain scholarship because of my race or gender.  I think that women and especially sorority women are often misunderstood and stereotyped.

> A white female student who wants to go into health care administration wrote clearly about how being female has motivated her career goals, "Being female has influenced my career choices.  It has impacted different areas of study I've been interested in and led me to want to overcome a gender gap in administration roles."  One student describes how gender influences not only mental goals, but physical ones:

> I think that being a female that is an able body has influenced my behavior during times that men have thought I wouldn't be able to lift heavy objects, or complete difficult tasks has made me want to prove them wrong or show that I can do what they can.

In addition to the impact of gender on identity, race and the intersection of race and gender provide even more detail on the motivation behind career choice. Of the three students who identified as ethnically diverse, one hundred percent (100.00%) of them mentioned race as an identity they think about most frequently. According to one female African-American student who wants to pursue graduate school for epidemiology wrote:

> I probably think about my race and gender the most. Being a minority, people already have shaped their perception of you based on stereotypes and what is most often portrayed. Sometimes I feel like people expect me, being an African American female to act a certain way or not know how to conduct myself in a public setting and their almost in disbelief when I don't represent myself in a way they may have thought I would. I feel misunderstood or stereotyped sometimes being at a predominantly white institution.

The other female African-American student whose long-term goal is to become the CEO of a hospital stated similar feelings:

> The identity I think about most frequently is my race. I feel that I think about it the most because it is constantly something that is talked about. When I generally think of race, I'm thinking about disparities or racism. Being black, I have experienced many stereotypes such that I am a thief or that I should talk proper and that I am not smart.

Finally, a female Indian student who wants to go into health administration described how race, gender, and religion intersect with her career choice. "I tend to think about my gender, ethnicity, and religion the most. Being female in a professional/educated setting can have its challenges but adding in a different heritage can be difficult at times."

Overall, females reported their gender as having a strong impact on their career choice.  Most commonly, females wanted to fight the stereotypes that women could not work in certain fields and hold leadership positions.  Ethnically diverse students also wrote about how their race and gender intersect and have influence over their goals.

**Interpretation of Results of the Study**

The previous section discussed the findings of the various data collection sources, including focus groups, artifacts, observations, and informal interviews.  After careful coding and analysis, seven emergent themes were identified and described through the voices of the students.  The interpretation of the results follows, which will provide information on how the seven themes correspond to both the research questions and previous research.

Theme one was the identification and perception of job readiness skills.  Students most frequently reported communication skills and initiative as the job readiness skills that employers are looking for in recent graduates.  Based on the employer perception of job readiness literature provided in chapter two, employers are looking for people with communication skills and initiative.  This study's student population also matches up with the student perceptions of job readiness in the literature.  However, previous research shows that employers and employees may have differing assessments of these skills.  Employees tend to assess themselves as higher in areas such as oral and written communication skills, while employers say they may not really be as prepared as they think.  The results show that undergraduate public health students identify the same skillsets as other students and recent graduates.  At the same time, further research is needed on whether they actually possess these skills.

Students also mentioned the Public Health Capstone Seminar several times as another setting where they learned job readiness skills. Examples students provided included resume building, interviewing skills, and practical experience in public health through the capstone project in the community. The Public Health Capstone Seminar also seemed to have a positive impact on perceptions of job readiness outside of leadership education, which conflicts somewhat with the research question. This potentially challenges the notion that they are not receiving adequate practical education. However, students may need further education on applying these experiences to job readiness. Additionally, to increase perceptions of job readiness, students may need these experiences earlier in their college career, rather than their final semester as an undergraduate student. Further research may be needed studying a combination of leadership education with other topics included in the capstone course curriculum.

Theme two discussed the change in students' definition of leadership throughout the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course. Previously students noted leadership as being formal and based on a position or title. Based on written and verbal responses, students now define leadership as being less formal and the importance of the relationship between leader and follower. Also, there is a focus on teamwork and the fluidity of leadership and followership. Finally, students noted that after the course they now believe they are capable of being a leader, indicating an increase in self-efficacy toward leadership.

Discussed previously in the literature review, employers are looking for graduates with leadership skills (Lowden et al., 2011). Additionally, leadership is often an area that employers find to be deficient in their employees (The Conference Board, Inc. et al.,

2006). As leadership is a component of job readiness, this increase in self-efficacy

toward leadership appears to indirectly increase perceptions of job readiness. Students

also had significant diversity in their career and educational goals, which indicate that

their definition of leadership goes against traditional ideas, such as leaders only being in

the health administration sector. The breadth of career choices is also beneficial to the

future of public health leadership for a multitude of specialties.

Theme three focused on students' noted interest in volunteer work and service

learning. All students in the course identified either volunteer work or service learning as

important to them personally and critical to their career goals. As future public health

professionals, these students will be required to work in teams and interact with diverse

populations. Volunteering and service give them an opportunity to work on both of these

skills, and students noted the benefit of these experiences. Many students used service

and volunteering as examples of their previous leadership experience, and that it

contributed to their perceived job readiness positively.

Student interests also line up with more recent university initiatives for beyond

the classroom learning, such as service learning courses. Currently, the only service

learning experience that is required for all public health students is the Public Health

Capstone Seminar taken in their last semester. With public health being a service field,

they need significant practical experience beyond the classroom while also learning the

conceptual ideas within the classroom. If they do not strategically seek out integrative

opportunities outside of the public health curriculum, they may not have adequate

experience. While students did not identify specific courses that contributed to their

positive feelings and experiences in service learning, this may be an area for additional

research to determine the potential link to job readiness in public health students. By increasing the opportunities for service learning in the public health curriculum, perceptions of job readiness could potentially be increased further. Additionally, there is a need for a strong relationship between faculty and community partners to facilitate the practical experience.

Theme four included the need for stress management in job readiness. All students enrolled in the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course self-reported that they were currently under moderate or high stress. These results were interesting as stress is only likely to increase in the workforce. Employers need people who can handle the required aspects of their job when placed in stressful situations. Students also seem to be aware that stress management is important for job readiness. However, there is a question of whether students think they can manage stress. The student responses indicate that there is a need for stress management as a part of job readiness for public health students, which could exist within or outside of leadership education.

Theme five focused on the concern students had about others contributing in teamwork. Students had an astute understanding that teamwork is critical to success in the public health workforce. At the same time, the majority of students reported that they have a high concern that everyone would not contribute equally in a group project or task. A study cited in the literature review noted that a lack of teamwork was one of the top reasons recent graduates were terminated from their first job (Gardner, 2000).

While everyone was concerned that others were not doing the work needed, they did not identify themselves as people who did not contribute equally in groups. There is the possibility that there is something unique about the group of students who self-

enrolled in the leadership course.  Conversely, students may have a lack of perception about their own job readiness weaknesses.  The results around teamwork show that students understand the significance, but that they may need additional training on effective team and group dynamics.

Theme six revolved around students reporting a positive increase in self-efficacy by learning more about self-leadership throughout the course.  Students identified self-assessments and case studies as directly impacting their perceptions of job readiness positively.  My observations agreed with the student comments, as I noticed significant student engagement and collaboration during the class sessions on case studies.  The findings also compare to the literature, especially regarding the impact of hands-on opportunities such as problem-based learning.

Additionally, learning about leadership theories was also reported as having a positive influence.  More specifically, students identified with reciprocal leadership theories the most, which closely aligns with the key tenets of public health.  There is also the potential for connection between theme two and six.  While students were learning more about self-leadership and gaining confidence, at the same time their definition of leadership began to shift to less formal and more fluid.  By the end of the semester, they also felt confident that they could be a leader.  Theme six showed the strongest positive connection with the primary research question.  Overall, learning more about self-leadership through methods such as self-assessments, case studies, and leadership theory helped them feel more prepared for the workforce.

Theme seven identified gender and race as having an impact on students' motivation for career choice.  Females overwhelmingly reported gender as the aspect of

their identity that they think about most often. For ethnically diverse students, their drive was compounded by the intersection of race and gender. Students had a variety of short-term and long-term public health career goals, and did not want to be defined by their racial or gender status. Diverse students used their identity as a motivating tool to fight back against stereotypes, especially in the workforce. The influence of gender and diversity in leadership education and job readiness would be an area recommended for further study.

Of importance to note is the small number of diverse students for certain populations in this study. While females were largely represented as the most prominent gender in the class, only three students identified as ethnically diverse. Only one student identified as a religion other than Protestant/Christian and no students reported having a non-heteronormative sexual orientation, so conclusions cannot be made on those populations. Also, with only one male student in the course, I focused only on analyzing the female perspective instead of trying to compare it with the male experience. Theme seven related closely with the secondary research question focusing on the experiences of diverse student populations. Gender and race do seem to have an impact on career choice motivation, indicating an area for focus regarding job readiness.

**Conclusion**

Chapter four focused on the findings from the data analysis, including the process and outcomes. The process for coding and theme creation was outlined and seven emergent themes were identified. Themes varied in scope such as areas identified for job readiness training, the topics and experiences that influence self-efficacy toward job readiness, and the impact of diversity on motivation behind career choice. The section on

findings of the study explored each of the seven themes in detail, allowing student voices to provide context and clarity.  Finally, an interpretation of the results of the study followed, providing a summary and synthesis of each of the seven key themes.  Chapter five will focus on the summary of the study, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Introduction**

The focus of the dissertation in practice (DiP) is the impact of leadership

education on perceived job readiness in undergraduate students. Chapter one provided an

introduction to the research questions and purpose of the study, a brief overview of

methodology, and the study's significance. Chapter two included a significant review of

the literature on leadership education and job readiness. Leadership education was

reviewed from the evolution of the field to the various types and prominent theories. Job

readiness was described from the student, employer, and university perspective. Chapter

three described the action research methodology of this exploratory case based qualitative

study. The data collection instruments were defined and the procedure was outlined in

detail. Chapter four provided the findings from the data analysis, including the seven

emergent themes, as well as the interpretation of the results. Chapter five focuses on the

overall summary of the study and recommendations for future research.

**Research Question**

The study's primary research question was, "How does leadership education

impact perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students?" The research question

was open-ended and qualitative, allowing for a broad range and strength of impact. The

exploratory case study design in qualitative research was the methodology utilized

throughout the study.

The study included a secondary research question asking, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in diverse undergraduate student populations?" Based on student enrollment, the influence of race, gender, and religion were explored to see if there were differences in experiences and outcomes for diverse student populations.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of leadership education on perceived job readiness in undergraduate students. The study allowed for the possibility of a positive influence, negative influence, or no influence between leadership education and job readiness. Based on the results, there is a potential opportunity for curricular revisions to tailor instruction and experiences for students while increasing job readiness perceptions.

**Overview/Summary of the Study**

The action research study included fourteen participants enrolled in the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course. Through the use of an exploratory case study design methodology, the qualitative research study explored the impact of leadership education on undergraduate student perceptions of job readiness. Throughout the course of the semester, students participated in focus groups, interviews, and submitted a variety of artifacts. Additionally, I collected observations on multiple occasions in the classroom.

After data collection, the data analysis procedures began with code development. Twelve codes were created at the beginning of analysis, and three emerged during the coding process. After all the data was coded, seven emergent themes were identified.

The seven themes provided insight into student perceptions of job readiness skills, their individual definition of leadership, personal interests and concerns, and the impact of diversity on career choice.

The primary research question asked, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in undergraduate students?" During an informal focus group, students noted that they believe communications skills and initiative are the primary traits that employers are looking for in recent graduates. Students not only believe that this is what employers desire, but they also perceive to possess these skills needed for job readiness. At the same time, students note that lack of practical experience in public health is the primary reason they are not ready for the workforce.

In addition to specific job skills, students stated they have increased confidence and self-efficacy by knowing more about self-leadership. Specific examples included completing case studies during the course that required students to put public health concepts in action, as well as taking self-assessments to learn more about their personal strengths. Additionally, learning about leadership theory helped students learn more about themselves as a leader. These experiences helped students feel more capable of being a leader while at the same time shifting their personal definition of leadership. At the beginning of the semester, students believed that leadership was formal and required a positional title. By the end of the semester, students noted the fluidity of leadership and their own ability that they can be a leader. Since leadership is a necessary skill noted by employers, an increase in self-efficacy toward leadership through the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course provides a key connection between leadership education and job readiness.

While not stated explicitly by students during the last class session's informal focus group, a few other skills and experiences needed for job readiness emerged through their written artifacts. One experience noted as significant to leadership experience and job readiness is volunteer work and service learning. Students noted positive experiences by taking part in these opportunities and found them to be of personal interest. With the person-centered alignment of the public health field, having an interest in and passion for helping others is significant to job readiness.

Secondly, stress management was identified as a potential area of need for job readiness in undergraduate students. All students self-reported being under moderate or high stress during the semester enrolled in the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course. Since students are likely to experience stressful situations in both their personal and professional lives after graduation, creating healthy stress management behaviors during undergraduate education can have a positive impact on job readiness.

Finally, students noted a significant unease about working in teams, which is concerning based on the need for combined efforts in the public health workforce. While students identified teamwork as being important in public health, they had strong concerns that others would not contribute equally in the workload. Students need additional training on team and group dynamics as well as skills such as conflict resolution in order to be successful in a team-oriented work environment. Also, it was interesting to note that no students identified themselves as being guilty of not contributing equally in teams, which questions whether they are a unique population or their own perceptions may not be entirely accurate.

The secondary research question asked, "How does leadership education impact perceptions of job readiness in diverse undergraduate student populations?" Based on the student enrollment in the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course, only race and gender were able to be assessed in regards to diverse populations. However, race and gender did seem to have a significant impact on students and their motivation behind career choice. With a largely female student group, gender was noted multiple times as being a key driver for their career goals. For ethnically diverse students, race is a critical factor of their drive. Women of color also spoke about the combination of race, gender, and religion being critical to their identity. Students noted feeling the need to fight stereotypes and show that women can be in strong leadership positions within the field of public health. More research is needed on the specific methods of influence through gender in leadership education and job readiness as well as additional research on other diverse populations.

*Implications of the findings of the study.* The findings of the study have significant implications for undergraduate students regarding how to prepare them adequately for the workforce. Additionally, the study provided helpful feedback on how to improve the leadership education curricula more specifically tailored for public health undergraduate students. The following section outlines the overall implications of the findings and how they can be implemented.

One of the most commonly mentioned interests of students was practical experience in the field of public health. Students also mentioned volunteering and community service as experiences that made them feel more prepared for their futures in the workforce. Gaining experience beyond the classroom helps students take the

knowledge they have learned through their coursework and apply it in a real world setting. Based on student feedback throughout the study, I feel strongly that adding a practical experience component to leadership education, such as service learning, would be both well received by the students and beneficial to their perceptions of job readiness.

Based on the moderate to high self-reported stress levels of all student participants, adding a stress management component may be beneficial to students. Since they will need to be able to handle stress effectively in the workforce, this could be added to the current leadership education curriculum or through another course. Additionally, students need more training on effective team and group dynamics. The majority of students noted concerns about others contributing equally while working in teams. Given that they will be working heavily with others in the public health workforce, they need additional training on how to work effectively in teams. While in the current public health core curriculum they complete a number of group projects, they do not necessarily receive training on conflict resolution and group dynamics. Currently, the Foundations of Public Health Leadership curriculum includes course units on working in teams and understanding others, but it was apparent that students could benefit from more experience in this area. Team and group dynamics would be a critical component that fits well within the leadership education curriculum.

Another area that the study found to be important is the discussion of diversity and how it relates to public health and leadership. Students commonly noted gender and race as having a strong impact and motivation on their career goals and aspirations. This connection was uncovered mostly through coding and analysis after the study was completed. I found most of this association between diversity and careers through the

written artifacts. Having more open class discussions about diversity and how it relates to the public health workforce is another recommendation based on findings of the study. While students learn about diversity and social justice throughout their public health curriculum, the impact of their own diversity on personal and professional choice is not commonly discussed. More experiences within and beyond the classroom are needed to provide students with an outlet to discuss their own experiences, through outlets such as guest speakers and mentoring programs.

Regarding specific activities and lessons, students overwhelmingly reported the importance of case studies, self-assessments, and leadership theory as positively impacting their self-efficacy toward leadership. Three case studies were completed in-class throughout the semester, and students requested including even more case studies in the future. Including more lessons which require practical application within the classroom may help students utilize their leadership skills and gain more confidence in how to use their public health knowledge. Self-assessments such as the Clifton Strengths Quest assessment helped students identify their personal strengths as well as how it relates to others around them. Lastly, leadership theory was noted as helping students learn more about different leadership styles and how they personally define leadership. While entire courses could be taught on leadership theory, it is not necessarily recommended for all students. One unit was spent exclusively on leadership theory during the course, and then it was continually referenced throughout the semester in other units. I recommend exposing students to some leadership theory while also applying it to practical situations. The strongest implication based on this study is the importance of undergraduate students learning about self-leadership. When the information was applied

back to oneself, such as through the self-leadership paper, students reported greater confidence and saw the material as more tangible and relevant.

Additionally, the study found strong implications in favor of leadership education for all public health students, regardless of their career goals. Students participating in the study were interested in pursuing careers in health care administration, health policy, epidemiology, health education, and clinical care. There did not appear to be any relationship between career choice and their interest in leadership education. All students noted the importance of learning about leadership and their need for job readiness training, indicating that the focus of leadership education should not be targeted to a specific student population, such as health administration.

Overall, the study found aspects of leadership education which students reported as having a positive impact on their perceptions of job readiness. The study also found additional facets that were not included in the leadership course which had positive impacts on job readiness perceptions, such as service learning and volunteering. Based on the findings of the study, there were no parts of the leadership education course indicating a negative impact on student perceptions. With these results, it is recommended that leadership education be included within public health undergraduate education in some capacity.

Further research is needed before recommending that leadership education be a separate required core course in the curriculum, but there is the potential that it would be beneficial. Based on new public health accreditation criteria, leadership skills is a new competency area that must be met by all public health graduates. While additional research is needed and is outlined in the next section, it is recommended that the

Foundations of Public Health Leadership course continue as an upper-level elective course with the revisions and additions mentioned previously based on study results. At the same time, components of leadership education could be incorporated into the Public Health Capstone Seminar, which is already a required core course and is where students gain their practical experience out in the community. Since students mentioned resume building, interviewing skills, and their project from the capstone seminar as also having a positive impact on their perceptions of job readiness, this course would be a good fit for adding the leadership education components.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

In addition to the implications regarding curriculum, based on the findings of the study, there are also areas where further research is needed. Many of the suggestions for future research revolve around the potential differences between perceptions and actual behaviors or abilities. While student perceptions about job readiness are critically important, especially through the lens of self-efficacy, it is also necessary to assess actual skills and abilities. For example, students reported that they believe employers are looking for people with communication skills and initiative, which they believe they also possess. Future research is recommended on assessing communication skills and initiative in undergraduate students to see if their perceptions match up to ability. Additionally, students have strong concerns about equal contributions in teamwork, but do not refer to themselves as not putting forth equal effort. A recommendation for future research is to assess whether students are accurate about their own contributions in teamwork. Finally, the high level of stress reported by students highlights the need for stress management in order to be ready for the workforce. Future research is

recommended to assess if students do effectively manage stress as it matches up to their perceptions.

In addition to the study of perceptions versus action, there are other areas regarding leadership education and job readiness that need further research. Students noted specific experiences from their Public Health Capstone Seminar as helping them feel prepared for the workforce such as resume building, interviewing skills, and the capstone project out in the community. Future research is recommended on studying the effects of leadership education and those key components of the capstone seminar to see if the combination of the two has a greater impact on perceptions of job readiness. Service learning and volunteering were also noted as student examples of leadership experience and of personal interest. Future research could assess whether there are specific types of service learning courses or experiences that have a greater impact on perceptions of job readiness.

The impact of leadership education on perceptions of job readiness in diverse student populations should be studied further. With the limited sample size in this study, generalizable results cannot be determined. Future research should also seek out participants from other diverse populations in regards to religion, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. Based on the findings, a strong common theme ascertained was the impact of gender on career motivations. Therefore, it is recommended that the influence of gender on leadership education and job readiness be studied with a larger sample size.

In addition to further qualitative research, conducting quantitative studies on the topic would also be beneficial to the research questions. First, a quantitative pre-test

post-test design could study job readiness perceptions before and after leadership education to see the impact. The study could also be designed as a quasi-experimental comparison of the leadership course with the capstone seminar. Along with perceptions, I recommend also assessing actual job readiness skills in undergraduates pre- and post-graduation. Recent graduates could also be followed into the workforce and employer assessments could be compared with the cohort.

Finally, this qualitative study was created with an action research design to inform the teacher's practice and curriculum within her classroom. Due to the limited sample size, the results cannot be generalized to all public health undergraduate students. Further research is needed with larger sample sizes. Additionally, it is not known whether these are unique characteristics of public health undergraduate students, so it recommended that further studies be completed with other disciplines outside of public health.

**Conclusion**

This qualitative exploratory case study sought to explore perceptions of knowledge, understanding, skills, and abilities related to job readiness through the implementation of leadership education. Liberal education exposes students to a wide variety of courses and subject areas, increasing knowledge and attitudes. The current approach to liberal education theoretically aligns with the skills and abilities employers are requiring. However, a gap still exists between what students are learning and what employers desire.

The concepts of leadership education and job readiness are critically important to twenty-first century undergraduate liberal education. The average student is now keenly

interested in relating what they are learning in the classroom and how it will help them in their future careers.  The findings of this study indicate that there are important components of leadership education that may have positive impacts on students' perceptions of job readiness and self-efficacy for leadership in the workforce.

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APPENDIX A

FOUNDATIONS OF PUBLIC HEALTH LEADERSHIP SYLLABUS

## PUBH 499:  Foundations of Public Health Leadership
### Spring 2017 – Section 001
### Mondays and Wednesdays 2:20pm-3:35pm

## Required Text
- Komives, S. R., Lucas, N., & McMahon, T. R. (2013).  *Exploring leadership:  For college students who want to make a difference* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA:  Jossey-Bass
- Additional required readings will be posted on BlackBoard under Course Documents

## Course Description
An introduction to core principles in public health leadership.  Areas included are ethics, public health issues, communication issues, leadership competencies, and leadership values.

## Goals and Learning Outcomes
The overall goal of Foundations of Public Health Leadership is to explore the field of leadership studies as it relates to public health through mean of self-exploration, subject analysis, and application.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:
1. Identify various leadership styles and traits.
2. Explain the role of leadership in the field of public health.
3. Apply leadership techniques to public health scenarios.
4. Assess public health leadership through the use of case studies.
5. Propose a strategy for improving the field of public health with proven leadership approaches.

## Course Structure
The class format will include a variety of experiences, including but not limited to: seminar-style classroom and discussions, case-based learning, collaborative

activities and group projects, writing assignments, and verbal presentations.  The student will reinforce the information covered in the course by the use of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, reflection, verbal and written communication, and analytical reasoning.  The class format is designed in a way to engage auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners.

## Assessment and Grading Procedures

Throughout the semester, assignments will allow the student to earn 500 points toward their final grade.

**Participation** (5% or 25 points)
Course participation is expected and required in each class throughout the semester.  Participation in the class can be earned through attending class, being alert while in class, refraining from personal technology use, posing thoughtful questions regarding the assigned reading, building substantive comments during class discussion, and completing the introduction sheet for the course.  The introduction sheet will be passed out during the first day of class and completing the document will count for 10%, or 5 points, of your participation grade.

**Self-Leadership Paper** (15% or 75 points)
Students will evaluate and assess their own personal leadership style and traits. The paper requirement is set at 3-5 pages in length and additional details will be provided in the assignment prompt on Blackboard. The goals of this assignment are to help students be able to:
- Identify various leadership styles and traits;
- Explain the role of leadership in the field of public health; and
- Apply leadership techniques to public health scenarios.

**Public Health Leader Paper** (15% or 75 points)
Students will evaluate and assess the leadership style and traits of a past or present public health leader.   The paper requirement is set at 3-5 pages in length and additional details will be provided in the assignment prompt on Blackboard.  The goals of this assignment are to help students be able to:
- Identify various leadership styles and traits;
- Explain the role of leadership in the field of public health; and
- Apply leadership techniques to public health scenarios.

**Group Project** (30% or 150 points)
Students will complete a group project proposing a strategy for improving the field of public health utilizing specific leadership approaches.  Students will complete various

assignments throughout the semester with their group as well as a 15-20 minute group presentation at the end of the semester.  Additional details will be provided in the assignment prompt on Blackboard.  The goals of this assignment are to help students be able to:

- Explain the role of leadership in the field of public health;
- Apply leadership techniques to public health scenarios; and
- Propose a strategy for improving the field of public health with proven leadership approaches.

*Group Project Grade Breakdown*:
Individual participation in team:  20% or 30 points
Group assignment sheet:  10% or 15 points
Team dysfunction worksheet:  10% or 15 points
Group project outline:  30% or 45 points
Presentation:  30% or 45 points

**Final Paper** (35% or 175 points)
In continuation of the group project, students will complete a 10-15 page individual paper identifying in detail how they would improve the field of public health utilizing specific leadership approaches as well as their own strengths.  Additional details will be provided in the assignment prompt on Blackboard.  The goals of this assignment are to help students be able to:

- Explain the role of leadership in the field of public health;
- Apply leadership techniques to public health scenarios; and
- Propose a strategy for improving the field of public health with proven leadership approaches.

**Extra Credit**
During the semester, an opportunity is provided to earn extra credit in this class.  Office hours allow you to discuss class topics you find interesting, ask questions regarding class assignments, discuss future career or school plans, as well as get to know your instructor.  In order to encourage participation in office hours, you will be offered 10 extra credit points toward your final grade by attending the scheduled office hours *before* March 2, the midpoint in the semester.  The first office hour visit will be the only one counted as extra credit; subsequent office hour participation does not accrue points.  Incentive is given to attend office hours earlier in the semester, although you are welcome to come all semester long!

## Course Grading

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Participation | 5% | 25 points |
| Self-Leadership Paper | 15% | 75 points |
| Public Health Leader Paper | 15% | 75 points |
| Group Project | 30% | 150 points |
| Final Paper | 35% | 175 points |
| *Total* | *100%* | *500 points* |

# Course Policies

## Academic Integrity
Remember, the first tenet of the Carolinian Creed states, "I will practice personal and academic integrity." As a student at the [university], you are expected to practice the highest possible standards of academic integrity. Any deviation from this expectation will result in a minimum academic penalty of failing the assignment, and can result in additional disciplinary measures, including referring you to the Office of Academic Integrity. Examples of violations include, but are not limited to: misrepresenting work as your own, using someone else's work, or failing to properly reference sources.

## Attendance Policy
Attending class is a requirement to gain valuable information covered in this class, therefore attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Students who arrive more than 10 minutes after the scheduled class session begins will be counted as absent. University policy states: "Absence from more than 10% of the scheduled class sessions, whether excused or unexcused, is excessive and the instructor may choose to exact a grade penalty for such absences." *In this class, 10% of sessions equal more than three absences during the semester. Additional absences will result in a 10-point deduction per absence from your final grade for the course.*

## Expectations for Classroom Behavior
The classroom is meant to prepare you for your future plans and careers, therefore behavior as a future public health professional will be expected. Respecting your instructor, fellow students, and any guest speakers are required throughout the semester, and therefore, the same respect will be given to you. This class is not an opportunity for you to complete readings or assignments for other classes in which you are enrolled.

*Technology Use:* Cell phones must be kept powered off, on silent, or on vibrate during the class period. Laptops may be used solely for the purpose of achieving the course's learning outcomes. *Text messaging, phone calls, Web browsing, audio or video playing, and earphones will not be accepted in this class.* If there is an emergency in which you think you may receive an important phone call during the class period, please inform the instructor before class, and you will be excused to enter the hallway to communicate.

Failure to follow the technology usage rules can result in being asked to leave class for the session. Persistent failure to abide by the technology usage rules can result in a classroom ban of technology devices for all students.

**<u>Assignment Submission</u>**
Assignments will contain explicit instructions regarding submission, and can include handing the work in during the class period or submitting on Blackboard. If you have any questions regarding assignment submission, please let the instructor know prior to the assignment's due date.

*Late Assignments: Late assignments will not be accepted, and failure to turn an assignment in on-time will result in a grade of zero.* If you suspect that you will be absent on the date an assignment is due in-class, contact the instructor to submit the assignment prior to class. If you are having trouble submitting an assignment on Blackboard, e-mail the assignment to the instructor to ensure that the assignment will not be late. The instructor may ask you to submit the assignment on Blackboard again once the issue has been resolved.

**<u>Accommodating Disability</u>**
Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Student Disability Services. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Office of Student Disability Services.

**<u>Expectations of the Instructor</u>**
As instructor for this course, my goal is to facilitate learning and discussions, treat students fairly, grade objectively, and respond to students in a timely fashion. As future public health professionals, I will treat students with respect as professionals and expect the same in return.

**<u>Amending the Syllabus/Rules</u>**
The syllabus for this course is a written contract between the student and instructor. While changes to the syllabus are not expected, in necessary circumstances, the instructor reserves the right to change rules, guidelines, and expectations as outlined in the syllabus at any given time. Students will be alerted to any changes made in the syllabus, but it will be the student's responsibility to record the change and ensure that the course requirements are successfully completed.

## Course Outline

| Day | Date | Class Topic | Pre-Class Assignment | Due Today |
|-----|------|-------------|----------------------|-----------|
| **1** | Monday, January 9 | Introduction/Review Syllabus and Course Expectations | George Epilogue | **Intro Sheet** |
| **2** | Wednesday, January 11 | An Introduction to Leadership | Komives Ch. 1 | |
| **-----** | Monday, January 16 | NO CLASSES – MLK DAY | ------------------ | ------------------ |
| **3** | Wednesday, January 18 | An Introduction to Leadership | Komives Ch. 1 | |
| **4** | Monday, January 23 | The Changing Nature of Leadership | Komives Ch. 2 | **Group Sheet** |
| **5** | Wednesday, January 25 | The Relational Leadership Model | Komives Ch. 3 | |
| **6** | Monday, January 30 | Summary:  Leadership for a Changing World | Case One | |
| **7** | Wednesday, February 1 | Understanding Yourself/ Self-Leadership | Komives Ch. 4 | |
| **8** | Monday, February 6 | Understanding Yourself/ Self-Leadership | George Ch. 3 | |
| **9** | Wednesday, February 8 | Understanding Others/ Cross-Cultural Leadership | Komives Ch. 5; Moodian Ch. 12 | |
| **10** | Monday, February 13 | Understanding Others/ Cross-Cultural Leadership | Hofstede Ch. 10; Bb Reading (Starbucks in China) | **Self-Leadership Paper** |
| **11** | Wednesday, February 15 | Leading with Integrity/ Ethical Leadership | Komives Ch. 6 | |
| **12** | Monday, February 20 | Leading with Integrity/ Ethical Leadership | Kellerman Ch. 2-3 | |
| **13** | Wednesday, February 22 | Summary:  Exploring Your Potential for Leadership | Case Two | |
| **14** | Monday, February 27 | Being in Communities | Komives Ch. 7 | |
| **15** | Wednesday, March 1 | Being in Communities | Komives Ch. 7 | **Public Health Leader Paper** |
| **-----** | Monday, March 6 | NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK | ------------------ | ------------------ |
| **-----** | Wednesday, March 8 | NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK | ------------------ | ------------------ |

| Day | Date | Class Topic | Pre-Class Assignment | Due Today |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | Monday, March 13 | Interacting in Teams and Groups | Komives Ch. 8 | |
| 17 | Wednesday, March 15 | Interacting in Teams and Groups | Komives Ch. 8 | |
| 18 | Monday, March 20 | Understanding and Renewing Complex Organizations | Komives Ch. 9 | **Group Project Outline; Team Worksheet** |
| 19 | Wednesday, March 22 | Summary: Context for the Practice of Leadership | Case Three | |
| 20 | Monday, March 27 | Understanding Change | Komives Ch. 10 | |
| 21 | Wednesday, March 29 | Group Project Meetings Outside the Classroom | ----------------- | |
| 22 | Monday, April 3 | Understanding Change | Komives Ch. 10 | |
| 23 | Wednesday, April 5 | Strategies for Change | Komives Ch. 11 | |
| 24 | Monday, April 10 | Strategies for Change | Komives Ch. 11 | |
| 25 | Wednesday, April 12 | Thriving Together | Komives Ch. 12 | |
| 26 | Monday, April 17 | Thriving Together | Komives Ch. 12 | |
| 27 | Wednesday, April 19 | Summary: Making a Difference with Leadership | ----------------- | **Groups #1-2 Present** |
| 28 | Monday, April 24 | Summary: Making a Difference with Leadership | ----------------- | **Groups #3-4 Present** |
| ----- | Wednesday, April 26 | **Final Exam Period 12:30pm-3:00pm** | ----------------- | **Final Paper** |

APPENDIX B

LIST OF DATA DOLLECTION TOOLS AND CORRESPONDING DATES

| Data Collection Tool | Date of Data Collection |
| --- | --- |
| Introduction worksheet | Monday, January 9, 2017 |
| Open-ended questionnaire | Wednesday, January 18, 2017 |
| Case study observation #1 | Monday, January 30, 2017 |
| Identity worksheet | Wednesday, February 8, 2017 |
| Self-leadership paper | Monday, February 13, 2017 |
| Case study observation #2 | Wednesday, February 22, 2017 |
| Public health leader paper | Wednesday, March 1, 2017 |
| Team dysfunction worksheet | Monday, March 20, 2017 |
| Case study observation #3 | Wednesday, March 22, 2017 |
| Narrowing my passions reflective writing | Wednesday, April 12, 2017 |
| Well-being worksheet | Monday, April 17, 2017 |
| Individual participation in team worksheet | Wednesday, April 19, 2017<br>Monday, April 24, 2017 |
| Group project presentations | Wednesday, April 19, 2017<br>Monday, April 24, 2017 |
| Focus group discussion | Monday, April 24, 2017 |
| End of course reflective writing | Monday, April 24, 2017 |
| Public health leadership strategy paper | Wednesday, April 26, 2017 |

APPENDIX C

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What were your reasons for choosing to take the Foundations of Public Health Leadership course?

2. What concepts or skills were you hoping to obtain by taking this course?

3. What does leadership mean to you?  What is your definition of leadership?

4. Describe how prepared you currently feel to go into the workforce.

5. In what ways do you believe you are prepared and/or unprepared for the workforce?

6. What experiences do you attribute to the reasons you feel prepared for the workforce? (Examples can include experiences from the classroom, workplace, volunteering, etc.)

7. What concepts learned or skills obtained would make you feel more prepared to go into the workforce?