The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership development process of former student leaders at Snow College. More specifically, the study focused on understanding how, when, and where leadership development took place in their “lived experience” within the student government at Snow College (Van Manen, 1998). Examining the lived experiences of these former college student leaders has helped bring forth the essence of their student leadership development process as it related to the Snow College student government program. The study identified key themes, formal and informal techniques, or common threads of success or failure that contributed to the knowledge base of student leadership development in this community college setting.

Through a phenomenological inquiry, eight former student government leaders were interviewed. Two principle research questions guided the design of this study: (a) While you were a student leader at Snow College, how did your leadership skills and abilities develop? (b) While you were a student at Snow College, how did the institution specifically contribute to your growth and development as a student leader?
Analysis of data yielded eight central themes, with 16 sub-themes nested within the central themes.

Four broad themes and seven sub-themes emerged from the first research question. They include: (1) Opportunities and three sub-themes: (a) Learning to serve and the changes that take place, (b) Inclusion and putting others first, (c) Learning by doing. (2) Structured Experiences and two sub-themes: (a) Student government, (b) Other experiences from being involved, (3) The influence of mentors, specifically advisors, (4) The formal Education Process and two sub-themes: (a) The Leadership Class, (b) Conferences and Retreats.

Four broad themes and nine sub-themes emerged from research question two. They include: (1) Snow College student government provided hands-on experiences, (2) Culture and three sub-themes (a) Invited participation, (b) The student is important to the institution, (c) Leadership driven environment, (3) Professional Support and four sub-themes: (a) Professional mentors, (b) Taught by example, (c) The college president, (d) High expectations to learn and do, (4) Education and two sub-themes: (a) The leadership class, (b) An established environment for active learning.

Emerging from these thematic descriptions were six observations that demonstrated how student leadership development took place at Snow College: (a) An Elected Position within Student Government was the Catalyst for Leadership Development; (b) There was an Institutional Culture at Snow College that Supported Student Leadership Development; (c) Professional and Engaged Advisors played a Intentional Key Role in Student Leadership Development; (d) The Structured Formal Learning Forums within Student Government are Important to Leadership Development; (e) The Informal, yet Structured, Hands-On Experiences Provided
Teaching Moments that made a Lasting Impression on these Participants; and (f) Unstructured yet Urgent Situational Leadership Decisions Connected to the Positions held within Student Government created Real Life Opportunities to Learn Leadership Skills.

Recommendations include: (a) Student government or some other significant student life program that will provide heightened leadership opportunities that will allow a student leader to practice or have hands-on leadership experiences; (b) The institution should have a culture that values the importance of student leadership development at all levels and lends support by creating opportunities for others including administration to mentor student leaders; (c) The institution’s primary goal is to educate, and this goal needs to be carried over to the leadership development program; (d) The institution should hire professional full-time advisors for their student life organizations such as student government or whatever organization is part of the student leadership development program; (e) There should be informal orchestrated experiences that help shape leadership skills and abilities in student leaders; and (f) The student leaders should be allowed hands-on experiences that are real and impactful such as those experienced by the study participants in student government at Snow College.
Student Leadership Development within Student Government at Snow College

by

Gordon Ned Wilson

A DISSERTATION

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degree of

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Gordon Ned Wilson, Author
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION OF DISSERTATION TOPIC

Introduction

The vice president of human resources, Pacific Division, for Honeywell Corporation was a former student leader at Salt Lake Community College:

My experience in student government is one of my favorite and most memorable experiences of my undergraduate work. There is not a day goes by that I don’t draw from one of many leadership experiences that I had as a student leader (M. Fisher, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

A sales representative for the Western United States Sound Tube Corporation was also a former student leader at Salt Lake Community College:

Every time I was out there doing business, I was faced with a new problem or challenge. As I decided how to deal with the situation, I often reflected on my experiences as a student leader at SLCC and how we were taught to just figure it out and make it happen. That gave me the confidence to do the same with my business decisions (M. Baer, personal communication, October 12, 2005).

The leadership program that the vice president and sales representative were referring to was the student government program at Salt Lake Community College. Many other former student leaders have echoed the same types of comments over the years.

Frank Budd, Ph.D. was president of Salt Lake Community College for nearly ten years. During his tenure of office he became quite familiar with student government and was very supportive because of the number of student leaders
who met with him often as they served on various committees and boards of the institution. He often referred to the student leaders as junior administrators because of their heightened leadership involvement and institutional involvement on boards and committees. Freeman and Goldin (2008) support this heightened leadership involvement in a recent two-part article in NASPA Journal; they said that “formal and informal leadership development experiences help individual students place value in and exhibit heightened personal characteristics” (2008, p. 3).

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) when speaking about higher education’s role in teaching leadership and preparing citizen leaders for the future said:

…that colleges need to develop not just better, but more leaders, and that efforts should be directed toward the entire student body…regardless of differences in academic discipline, organizational affiliation, cultural background, or geographical location, students must be better prepared to serve as citizen-leaders in a global community. (Miller, 2003, p. 196)

Many colleges and universities are participating in leadership development both formally and informally (Arensdorf, Brungardt, Greenleaf, & Brungardt, 2006; Freeman & Goldin, 2008). Formal leadership development is taking place in as many as 1000 colleges and universities across the country (Arensdorf et al., 2006). This includes several community colleges in Utah. In this context, formal leadership development refers to leadership concepts and skills being taught in a traditional classroom setting (Freeman & Goldin, 2008). In the same context,
informal leadership development refers to out of class experiential setting coupled with close association with an advisor who teaches, coaches, and advises each student involved. For the sake of this study, the researcher has defined “leadership” as a process of influencing others to pursue a common goal through the use of a set of learned skills, a shared vision, and by being in a position that provides opportunity to lead or influence others.

Formal and informal student leadership development opportunities are found within the context of experiential programs such as student government, clubs and organizations, and service learning (Astin & Astin, 2000; Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Kuh, 2003;). George Kuh, a renowned researcher on student retention and success, refers to involvement in experiential programs in a broader sense using the term “student engagement”; he defines student engagement as the time and energy that students devote to educationally purposeful activities and the extent to which the institution invites students to participate in activities that lead to student success (Kuh, 2003). Further, research has also indicated that “students involved in leadership activities have higher levels of educational attainment and increases in personal values (e.g., desire to promote racial understanding) than do students who do not participate in these activities” (Cress, et al., 2001, p.16).
Student government programs are commonplace on college and university campuses. A random search of any college or university website can find the institution’s student government. In some cases, a program does not exist in small and remote colleges or in the case of a private system such as University of Phoenix. During my nearly two decades of advising student leaders and government, I have become familiar with many large and small programs around the country through networking, professional conferences, publications, websites, and institutional visits. Traditionally these programs provide student life activities, act as a voice for students and provide student leadership opportunities. These programs also generally include formal teaching of leadership skills necessary to successfully complete their duties and responsibilities as student leaders. The opportunity to learn these skills and practice them on a daily basis as a student leader reinforces what students have been taught (Berg, 2003; Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). The leadership skills are essentially life skills (Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Komives et al., 2006) that will go with these student leaders when they move on at the end of their term of office as exemplified by the two former SLCC student leaders mentioned above.

Problem Statement

As a veteran practitioner who has advised and taught student leaders for over 17 years, I have witnessed leadership development take place in many of
these students. Questions have risen that gave merit to this study such as how, where, and when does leadership development take place in student leaders. Other questions include: How would former student leaders, given time to put things in perspective, describe this process? What did the experience mean to them and what role, if any, did the institution play in contributing to their development and experience?

Most of these students came into student government having had prior leadership experiences from their high school student government, clubs, workplace, sports team, missionary service, or armed services. Day and O’Connor (2003) both discussed the importance of ongoing experiences, such as those mentioned above, since they provide much of the richness that adds to leadership development. Taking this into consideration, over the years I have observed something that has taken place within the context of student government involvement as well as from their formal and informal leadership education that “heightened” (Freeman & Goldin, 2008) their leadership development.

There are vast amounts of information about leadership development programs and a variety of tools to measure leadership skills (Miller, 2003; Murphy & Riggio, 2003) but I have found very little research that attempts to answer questions mentioned above. The research I reviewed is very broad and formal in its approach and lacks any attempt to personalize the study by listening to the students’ experiences and their descriptions of the leadership development
phenomenon. This notion of understanding the leadership development philosophy is also reflected in a book called *The Future of Leadership Development*, the authors Murphy and Riggio (2003) point this about leadership development:

In recent years, there has been an explosion of interest in leadership. The bulk of research efforts has gone into trying to understand leadership-how it operates-and into identifying the characteristics of effective leaders...Influential organizations, such as the Center for Creative Leadership, the Gallup Organization, as well as many centers associated with universities around the world and noted leadership scholars are turning their attention to the difficult topic of truly trying to understand the process of leadership development (p. 3).

The goal of this study was to hear directly from former student leaders and explore how they described their leadership development experiences, what these experiences meant to them, and what part the college’s formal leadership program contributed to their personal leadership development. By focusing on the former students’ stories and their experiences, I did uncover more specific and contextual based ways of understanding how this process took place in one community college student government program. On the subject of the process of leadership development and the lack of scientific studies about the process, Day and O’Connor (2003) say that “it might be disheartening to contemplate how relatively little we know right now about the process of leadership development, especially from a scientific perspective” (p. 25). The findings of this study may increase meaning and understanding from the student perspective to help other
practitioners from student government programs to better understand the phenomenon of leadership development experienced by their student leaders. It may also help other professional staff to think more comprehensively about the process of student leadership development within the scope of student government or similar student leadership programs.

As a result of the need to better understand how, when, and where student leadership development takes place, this research focused on one community college and a small number of former student leaders in an attempt to listen very closely to their personal experiences. Snow College in Ephraim, Utah was selected because it has a history of student government, student leaders, and a formal and informal leadership development program offered in a community college setting. The college’s student government started in 1914 and has continued to the present, and a for-credit leadership class has been in place for over 25 years. The college also has held an annual leadership training conference for student government leaders each fall dating back to 1973. On a state level, the student leaders have participated in the Utah Leadership Academy every spring since 1985. This formal training has been supplemented by professional advisors that have provided informal leadership training such as small group or individual discussions based on leadership issues or concerns at hand.
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership development process of former student leaders at Snow College. More specifically, the study focused on understanding how, when, and where leadership development took place in their “lived experience” within the student government at Snow College (Van Manen, 1998). Examining the lived experiences of these former college student leaders has helped bring forth the essence of their student leadership development process as it related to the Snow College student government program. The study identified key themes, formal and informal techniques, or common threads of success or failure that contributed to the knowledge base of student leadership development in this community college setting. Although the results of this study cannot be generalized, this new knowledge may provide additional understanding to my colleagues, especially those at community colleges. Van Manen (1998) describes this type of phenomenological research as “the ability to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (p. 36).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

- While you were a student leader at Snow College, how did your leadership skills and abilities develop? The significance to the reader is that I have
not found another study that attempts to give voice to the student leadership development process. Hearing directly from former student leaders as they describe how their leadership skills developed will be beneficial to this qualitative research.

- While you were a student at Snow College, how did the institution specifically contribute to your growth and development as a student leader? The significance to the reader is that student leadership development as it occurs in a community college setting is virtually unheard of in formal studies on the subject. Gaining access to a community college with both student leaders and a formal student leadership development program provides valuable data and insights to this research.

**Significance**

There is a lot of information about student leadership development programs at four-year and graduate level institutions. Much of this research comes from a quantitative approach though few, if any, from a qualitative perspective (Murphy & Riggio, 2003). Further review of the literature on student leadership development has demonstrated that there is very little research about leadership development specifically involving students from community colleges. Yet community colleges play a pivotal role in training young people in communities
all across America. One researcher who made a case for student leadership development in community colleges said:

Community Colleges are a democratizing force in post-secondary education different but equal to universities. They offer an expedient route to the labor market. This suggests the need for colleges to focus on the development of their students’ leadership ability and to implement strategies for evaluating the success of leadership development efforts on college campuses (Jacob, 2006, p. 1).

Reviewing some statistics sheds some light on the importance of community colleges and their significant role higher education nationwide. Forty-six percent of all undergraduates choose community colleges as the place to start their college experience; 65% of new healthcare workers get their training at community colleges; 95% of businesses and organizations that recruit from technical and community colleges praise their workforce education and training programs (AACC, 2006). These statistics place a huge responsibility to additionally develop leadership skills in those who receive their higher education and training at community colleges.

This research has examined how, if at all, leadership development took place in a community college setting. This was accomplished by centering on the voices of former student leaders from one community college. The findings of the study hopefully have lent one more aspect to the important role that community colleges play in training and preparing students for the workplace and for society. As a veteran student leadership development professional on a community college
campus, I have observed change and growth in students like those mentioned in the introductory section, but I have not found any hard evidence of how and where this leadership development takes place. Susan Murphy and Ronald Riggio (2003) with the help of 27 other contributing researchers compiled an extensive book of research on student leadership development called *The Future of Leadership Development*. A common theme in this book is that leadership development happens but the scientific data to support how it happens is lagging far behind (Murphy & Riggio, 2003).

The goal of this study was to strive to understand the essence of this process through the eyes, ears, and feelings of the students and their lived experiences on a community college campus. What formal and informal experiences did these former student leaders have throughout their leadership training process within Snow College Student government that has enhanced their ability to understand, internalize, and cultivate in their personal leadership skills and philosophies?
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to hear directly from former student leaders at Snow College and explore with them their leadership development experiences while at the college. How, where, and when did the processes of learning leadership take place for students that participated in formal leadership programs? This chapter will provide a framework for the reader to understand the need for the proposed study and the rationale for its design. From my extensive review of research on student leadership development, very little literature studies leadership from a qualitative approach and, more specifically, from a phenomenological approach, illuminating and helping us understand the journey a young person makes as he or she learns, understands, and practices leadership.

There are volumes of literature that define leadership, discuss leadership development, and even approach leadership from a biographical base. This study, however, adds a different perspective to the understanding of the leadership development process as experienced and expressed through the voice of former student leaders in a community college. Riggio, Ciulla and Sorenson (2003) in their evaluation of formal student leadership education discuss “the need for following alumni for several years to truly evaluate the effectiveness of leadership development programs in a college environment” (p. 223). They are speaking of a longitudinal study of course, but this qualitative study will help give voice to at
least one college that professes student leaders and leadership development by
hearing from its alumni student leaders.

*Literature Review Process*

Gathering information for this chapter was difficult because of the extremely large amounts of literature on the topic of leadership from various educational and professional sources. Next were the volumes of information tied to the term “leadership development.” I researched several sources of information, including U.S. and Canadian higher education journals, professional journals, dissertations, books, Educational Research Information Center (ERIC) resources, U.S. Census Bureau Statistics, and the Council for the Advancement of Standards of Higher Education (CAS) database. The key phrases and words used in the search process were: (a) student leadership development, (b) leadership, (c) student leadership, (d) college and university student leadership, (e) student involvement, and (f) student engagement. The time period studied was from the late 1990s up to the present for the professional journals and studies. For the books reviewed, the research was extended back to the 1970s and up to the present as this allowed a broader scope of understanding the great emphasis that has been placed on leadership development over the last several decades.

It should also be noted that most of the research about student leadership development is focused on four-year colleges and universities. Very little research
focuses on or includes community colleges. Since community colleges are part of the higher education system, this research will explore what is taking place on all college and university campuses. At the same time, special attention has been given to any research that specifically focused on or included community colleges.

The topic of leadership and leadership development is broad, with volumes of quantitative information readily available for anyone to study. However, this study was qualitative in its approach with an emphasis on student leadership development within student government members in a community college setting. In setting the framework and foundation for this study, the next several sections will reflect the broader focus on leadership, leadership development, and current leadership development programs functioning in the higher education system.

Section one explores the student leadership development programs currently on college and university campuses. Section two explores definitions of leadership and the developmental process. Section three focuses on how we get well-trained and well-qualified leaders. From these summaries, a working definition of leadership and the development process emerged to guide this study.
Progress of College and University Student Leadership Development Programs

Recognized scholars and authors on the subject of leadership like John W. Gardner, James MacGregor Burns, Thomas J. Peters, and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. all challenged higher education to re-think, re-tool, and foster new and creative ways to prepare graduates for the workplace (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1990; Peters & Waterman, 1982). The Professional Standards for Higher Education from the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has prepared standards to guide colleges and universities in preparing citizen leaders for the workplace. In support of the role that higher education plays in this preparation, they said:

…that colleges need to develop not just better, but more leaders, and that efforts should be directed toward the entire student body…Regardless of differences in academic discipline, organizational affiliation, cultural background, or geographical location, students must be better prepared to serve as citizen-leaders in a global community (Miller, 2003, p. 196).

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has funded the largest study of student leadership development to date. They spent nearly one decade of time and millions of dollars studying the best way to prepare young adults to become leaders (Astin & Astin, 2000; Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999). The final report said:

The most important findings of this report confirm a belief that has operated on college campuses for many years: leadership can be developed in college students if a commitment is made to do so. Concrete evidence for that assertion is provided….The leadership potential of students can be intentionally built. This can be both a great source of hope
and a source of challenge to higher education and society (Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999, p. 2).

A preponderance of evidence suggests college leadership opportunities and activities are the core elements in effectively developing leaders (Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999; Berg, 2003; Cress et al., 2001; Freeman & Goldin, 2008). As part of this initiative to develop leadership abilities in college undergraduates, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation sponsored specific leadership programs at 31 institutions. The success of this large-scale sponsorship “demonstrated that colleges and universities can provide highly effective environments for the development of future leaders” (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. viii). Another similar study stated in their conclusions on leadership development that:

If institutions are serious about developing lifelong competencies in their students; if they value connecting academic learning with community concerns; and if they desire to graduate a legacy of leaders in businesses, organizations, governments, schools, and neighborhoods, then leadership development programs and activities must be given priority (Cress et al., 2001, p. 23).

It is obvious from this study that the researchers firmly believe that raising a new generation of leaders requires institutions of higher education to give top priority to the leadership development process. Further, research has indicated that students involved in leadership activities have higher levels of educational attainment and increases in personal values (e.g., a desire to promote racial
understanding) than do students who do not participate in these activities (Astin & Astin, 2000).

As a result of the Burkhardt and Zimmerman-Oster (1999) study, the researchers created several hallmark summaries for exemplary institutional leadership development. The hallmarks are consistent with other recommendations from other practices and studies of the same nature. The most successful leadership development programs are effectively situated within a specific context. This context includes the following elements:

- The program has a strong connection between its mission and the mission of the institution.

- The program has an approach that is supported across the institution. It includes an academic component, as well as theoretical underpinnings that link curricular and co-curricular activities.

- The program has an academic home above and beyond the departmental level – ideally under the auspices of both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.

- The program has strong leadership. This will often be either a tenured, faculty-level director with research expertise in leadership or youth development or it will be a highly experienced member of the Student Affairs community (Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999, p. 13).

The most successful leadership development programs tend to share a common intellectual framework. This includes the following:

- Individuals involved have a commitment to the concept of leadership development for young adults.
• Program leaders have a clear theoretical framework, knowledge of the literature, and well-defined values and assumptions.

• Key stakeholders in the program use consensus to develop a working definition of leadership from the outset. For example, several W.K. Kellogg Foundation-funded projects have a definition of leadership that 1) focuses on ethical and socially responsible behavior, 2) recognizes that leadership is a relational process, and 3) emphasizes the potential of all people to lead.

• Key stakeholders ensure that there is a comprehensive, coordinated educational strategy, which includes experiential learning opportunities (e.g., service learning, outdoor challenge courses) as well as intellectual development.

• Participants are encouraged to build specific skills while developing their awareness of leadership theory and issues. These skills include collaboration, critical thinking, systemic thinking, and cultural dexterity (Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999, p. 12).

This summary of hallmarks can guide institutions which are seeking to develop learning outcomes for their student leadership development programs.

In another study, Cress et al. (2001) also concluded many of the same things but categorized them in three general categories:

Three common elements of the leadership programs in this study emerged as directly impacting student development: (a) opportunities for service (such as volunteering); (b) experiential activities (such as internships); and (c) active learning through collaboration (such as group projects in the classroom) (p. 23).

The Kravis Leadership Institute also conducted a study during the same time frame as the Kellogg studies just mentioned. They focused specifically on undergraduate leadership programs on college and university campuses. In all
they looked at 49 institutions and of those 49, they looked extensively at 10 programs that had received Kellogg grant money for leadership development. They focused on what was encompassed in each of these undergraduate leadership programs and what commonality they shared one with another as well as what successes they had achieved in their programs. In the end, they essentially reached the same conclusions discussed in the Kellogg studies and referred often to those findings as part of their conclusions. The author of the Kravis study stated the following as part of her final thoughts:

Creating hope for change and the possibility of what could be in the future is a key facet of leadership. Each person creates an impact on how the future will unfold. Providing students with opportunities to explore their own ‘visions for the future’ and helping them build and expand their own self-understanding is what leadership development is all about. Undergraduate leadership studies programs are a powerful venue for creating the future – for all of us (Olson, 1999, p. 12).

Finally, colleges and universities are well-suited for student leadership development. Many institutions of higher education are currently at different stages of training and teaching leadership as part of their curriculum. Successful programs have institutional support from both academic and student affairs. A significant amount of time, money, and research has created common elements of success for leadership development programs.

A good example of a new and innovative approach to student leadership development can be found at Utah Valley University. They offer students several options to study and practice leadership while continuing their chosen
coursework. The options offered provide different certificates of completion that appear on their transcripts. The different options coincide with increased leadership training and increased participation in experiential leadership activities such as student government, club leadership, and internships (see Appendix A for details of the program and certificate options).

Leadership Development

There are over 225 definitions of leadership found in the literature. But we don’t claim the last word on “defining” leadership. It’s been said, “You can’t capture a river in a bucket,” and we believe the same can be said about trying to define leadership. We can investigate, analyze, and examine leadership, but in this endeavor we too often fail to capture its true essence (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. vii).

As Kouzes & Posner (1995) pointed out leadership can be defined many different ways and I agree that there is no one agreed upon definition of leadership. Despite this, and for the purpose of this research, I will define leadership in this section. I will review other statements to help shape my definition of leadership. I will synthesize their comments and then create my own working definition of leadership as I see it working in the framework of student leadership development. The statements I will use are the following:

- Leadership occurs within groups of people called organizations. Second, leadership involves mutual influence, a give-and-take, between organizational members called leaders and others within the organization. Finally, the leadership is goal oriented (Owens, 2007 p. 6).

- Leadership is an observable, learnable set of practices. Leadership is not something mystical and ethereal that cannot be understood...
by ordinary people. Given the opportunity for feedback and practice, those with the desire and persistence to lead—to make a difference—can substantially improve their abilities to do so (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 2).

- Leadership is not a place, it’s not a gene, and it’s not a secret code that can’t be deciphered by ordinary people. The truth is that leadership is an observable set of skills and abilities that are useful whether one is in the executive suite or on the front line, on Wall Street or Main Street, in any campus, community, or corporation (Posner, 2009, p. 1).

- Leadership is a relationship-building, developing, procedural, educated, and transformational experience (Freeman & Goldin, 2008, p. 2).

From the above definitions I have identified several themes. First, leadership is learnable set of skills, abilities, and practices. Second, leadership development is a process that takes practice. Third, leadership involves relationships and the process of influencing others.

As mentioned earlier, for the sake of this research I have synthesized these themes into the following definition of leadership and the development process:

*Leadership is a process of influencing others to pursue a common goal. This process is facilitated by the use of a set of learned skills, shared goals, and by being in a position that provides opportunity to lead or influence others.*

*How Do We Get Well-trained and Well-qualified Leaders?*

Elements of student leadership development are found in many colleges and universities across America (Arsensdorf, 2006; Freeman & Goldin, 2008). One aspect of student government programs is to help student leaders develop
leadership (Miller, 2003). Each program may look and feel different, but leadership development is a part of any student government program (Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Miller, 2003). This includes formally teaching necessary leadership skills and traits to help them successfully complete their duties and responsibilities as student leaders. The ability to learn leadership skills and traits formally and then to have an opportunity to practice them on a daily basis as student leaders reinforces what they have learned (Astin & Astin, 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Murphy & Riggio, 2003). These leadership skills and traits are essentially life skills that will go with these student leaders when they move on at the end of their term of office.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation found that of the 58,183 participants in their study, 93% maintained an increased sense of civic, social, and political awareness. Other positive aspects found in this research were increased communication skills, increased commitment to volunteerism, increased sense of social responsibility, and improved problem solving (Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999, p. 8).

In another extensive study, “Does Leadership Education and Training Make a Difference?”, done by Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt in 2001 and Zimmerman-Oster in 1999, which eventually became the Association of College Personnel Administrators (ACPA) research article of the year, the authors studied 875 students at ten colleges and universities to assess whether student
participation in leadership education and training programs has an impact on education and personal development. The results indicate that leadership participants showed growth in civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theories, and personal and societal values. The results of the study are listed below to demonstrate the significance that leadership development can have on students involved:

1. Participants in some form of college activity reported that their “understanding of self” was stronger or much stronger since entering college; participants in leadership activities rated this change at a higher level than non-participants did.

2. Participants were more likely to report growth in their commitment to civic responsibility, conflict resolution skills, ability to plan and implement programs and activities, and willingness to take risks.

3. Participants were more likely to report holding an elected leadership position and to be very involved in co-curricular activities.

4. Participants were significantly higher than non-participants on 10 developmental outcome measures including ability to set goals, and interest in developing leadership skills in others.

5. Participants showed gains in three leadership areas: skills, values, and cognitive understanding.

6. Participants in leadership training activities were more likely to show significant gains four years after college matriculation than non-participants with regard to leadership understanding and commitment, civic responsibility, multicultural awareness, and community orientation.

7. Participants engaged in class projects that resulted in gains on four educational outcomes: Leadership skills, leadership understanding,
multicultural and community awareness, and insight into personal and societal values.

8. Participants in internship programs reported gains in leadership understanding and commitment, civic responsibility, and multicultural and community awareness (Cress et al., 2001, p. 18).

The findings of this study by Cress et al. (2001) support the arguments for leadership development of our young people on college campuses. It also supports the notion that students participating in leadership development will more likely make a difference as future leaders in their communities (Astin & Astin, 2000; Berg, 2003; Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999; Burns, 1978; Cress et al., 2001; Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Murphy & Riggio, 2003).
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative Approach Rationale

The purpose of this study was to hear directly from alumni student leaders at Snow College who have experienced leadership development in a collegiate setting. Neuman (2003) said that “social science is needed to study meaningful social action, we must learn the personal reasons or motives that shapes a person’s internal feelings and guides their decisions to act in particular ways” (p. 75). A qualitative study such as this one has helped give meaning and understanding to the former student leaders’ experiences. In addition, a qualitative study relies on the participants to create and define the construct rather than the researcher, and therefore provides a more comprehensive and robust description of the phenomena under review (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Using the qualitative methodology approach gave me an opportunity to gain insight and understanding of leadership development process through the minds and eyes of a few former student leaders.

Methodology Approach

I used a qualitative approach and followed the format of a phenomenological study to better understand the lived leadership experiences of former community college student leaders. Van Manen (1998) describes phenomenological research as “the ability to transform lived experience into a
textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (p. 36).

The former student leaders told their lived experiences and the compilation of these experiences have provided a framework for themes to emerge. From these themes and data analysis, the desired outcome was to better understand student leadership development on a community college campus and how leadership development took place.

*Key Concepts of Phenomenology*

Qualitative research is the umbrella that encompasses many philosophical orientations which includes interpretive, critical, and post modern. Under this umbrella there are several types of research designs such as case study, constructionism, ethnography, cognitive, idealist, phenomenology, post modern, grounded theory, and many others. These all have the common goal of searching for meaning and understanding a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Manen, 1998). This research used a phenomenological approach, which is the study of the lived experience or the essence of one’s experience. Polkinghorne (1989) says the “aim of phenomenological inquiry is to reveal and unravel the structures, logic, and interrelationships that obtain in the phenomenon under inspection” (p. 50). According to Van Manen (1998), the distinction between phenomenology and
other qualitative approaches is in the essence of the experience. When he described the lived experience, he said, “lived meanings describe those aspects of a situation as experienced by the person in it” (p. 183). This approach seeks to give deeper meaning and understanding of an event or experience a person or group has had in life.

The qualitative approach, such as phenomenology, provides a different kind of data or observation in research than does a quantitative approach. It offers things from experience such as space, time, body, and human relations as we humans experience them (Van Manen, 1998). A good definition of a qualitative study is “a process of inquiry into understanding a social or human problem based on construction of a complex and holistic picture that is verbally formulated” (Farmer & Rojewski, 2001, p. 91). Another author says that “qualitative research is designed to (1) understand processes, (2) describe poorly understood phenomena, (3) understand differences between stated and implemented policies or theories, and (4) discover thus far unspecified contextual variables” (Merriam, 2002, p. 11). Phenomenological research is a key process in good qualitative studies; it captures the lived experiences, structures of the experience, and the essence of the experience (Merriam, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Manen, 1998).
As in all research methods there are strengths and limitations. The difficulties that arise when using a phenomenological approach are as follows (Creswell, 1998, p. 55):

- The researcher requires a solid grounding in the philosophical precepts of phenomenology.
- The researcher needs to carefully choose individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.
- Bracketing personal experiences by the researcher may be difficult.
- The researcher needs to decide how and in what way his or her personal experiences will be introduced into the study.

It is obvious from the difficulties described; capturing the essence of a participant’s lived experience without personal bias is a complex process. Though if the research can be done with ethics, consistency, and validity the outcome of study can be very meaningful to those who read, learn, and attempt to understand experiences had by others. A researcher must be diligent in proper qualitative methodology to effectively listen to and describe what has taken place in another human being’s life (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002).

There are several key terms or elements that are central to the use of phenomenology as a research method (Creswell, 1998; Van Manen, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1989; Merriam, 2002). They are as follows:

- Essential or essence: This refers to the central underlying meaning of the lived experience.
• Phenomenon: This is the central experience or event that research participants will share about their lived experience with the researcher.

• Lived Experience: This is what the experience means to the participant.

• Intentionality of Consciousness: This is where the experiences contain both outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning.

• Phenomenological Data Analysis: This refers to the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and the search for all the possible meanings

• Bracketing and Epoch: This is the process of setting aside prejudgements and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience.

• Horizontalization of the data: This is where a researcher finds statements about how each participant experienced the phenomenon and list each significant statement, treating each as having equal value and ultimately seeking to make a list of non-repetitive statements.

*Origin of Phenomenology*

The term “phenomenology” has its origins from two different sources. One was written by G.W.F. Hegel in 1807 and from the other was written by Edmund Husserl in 1920. These researchers are noted for shaping key elements of phenomenological research. Some historians argue that Martin Heidegger made significant contributions to this term, but others argue that Heidegger may have been given credit for Husserl’s work. Husserl was a Jew when the Nazi party was in power in Germany and Heidegger was a member of the Nazi party at that same time. However, there are instances where Heidegger gave credit to Husserl and I argue that he developed his own aspect of phenomenology.
Many other researchers have evolved the original definitions and shaped this qualitative philosophy. These researchers are: Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, David Hume, Johann Heinrich Lambert, Immanuel Kant, Franz Brentano, Carl Stumpf, Max Scheler, and Alfred Schutz. Current authors have also added much to understanding phenomenology and have shaped its focus within qualitative research. These modern researchers are: John W. Creswell, Sharan B. Merriam, Donald E. Polkinghorne, Catherine Marshall, Gretchen B. Rossman, and Max Van Manen.

Participants

I interviewed eight former student leaders from Snow College. (Please see the *Data Collection Methods* section below for my justification of selecting eight former student leaders.) They were identified by the former Dean of Students and the former Director of Student Life and Leadership. I chose to work with the former Dean of Students and the former Director of Student Life and Leadership because I wanted to hear from former student leaders who are now alumni. Snow College has gone through some organizational changes in the past several years and has placed new professionals in both of these positions. Neither of the current individuals had any history with student government at the College and therefore did not have a basis for helping select former student leaders who could participate in this study. Also, the former student affairs personnel have over 20 years of involvement with Snow College student leaders and the student
leadership development process. Because of their combined years of experience, they were better suited to help select former student leaders that were well grounded in student government and they also knew who still lived in the area, making interviews and interaction possible for me. I compared a list and looked for common names that appeared on both the Dean’s and the Director’s lists before selecting the participants. According to Polkinghorne (1989), “the point of subject selection is to obtain richly varied descriptions, not to achieve statistical generalization” (p. 48).

The criteria used to select former student leader participants were designed to help find those who had been immersed in the college culture, the college experience, and had a depth of leadership development. Former student leaders had to meet all three criteria to be eligible. These criteria were:

- Former students with a history of participating in the college’s formal leadership development programs.

- Former students who were involved for at least one year so as to be able to capture the leadership development experience within Snow College. This helped find those who have demonstrated commitment to leadership opportunities and development.

- Former students with experience in student government from at least a chair position or vice president level.

Criteria for Dependable Knowledge

According to Van Manen (1998), a phenomenological study is scientific in a broad sense when it is systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective and
is based directly on the lived experience(s) of the participant(s). As a phenomenological researcher, one must be concerned about ethics, validity, consistency, and reliability of the research in order to gain credibility. Good research should be based upon dependable information and knowledge. It should portray an accurate account of the experiences given by the participants within the study. The data that is researched and analyzed must give the reader confidence and convince him or her of its validity. Truth is subjective to the understanding and perception of the reader and ultimately is left to the interpretation of the reader (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989). Using a phenomenological approach within the interpretive social science methodology can validate the study and authenticate the information and knowledge, since “it is intersubjective in that the human science researcher needs the other (for example, the reader) in order to develop a dialogic relation with the phenomenon, and thus validate the phenomenon as described” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 11).

Data Needed

The primary data consisted of personal interviews with former student leaders who were involved in the formal leadership program at Snow College. I also used a focus group discussion to capture any additional thoughts from the group. The data collected consisted of interview transcripts, journal entries, and field notes written to augment the interviews.
Data Collection Methods

Creswell (1998) points out that data collection is a very important step in research, this includes finding the people or participants and gaining access and establishing rapport so as to gather good information. To do this study, I conducted in-depth personal interviews with each former student leader in a setting that helped the participants feel comfortable, so as not to inhibit the sharing of data during the interview process. The settings for the interviews included their work office, public library, city park and home.

Phenomenological researchers are reluctant to say specifically how many individuals to include in the data collection for a single phenomenon. The rule of thumb that most researchers use is to include as many as it takes to saturate (or in other words: provide thick, richly-detailed descriptions) of the phenomenon. A few researchers specifically said that up to 10 individuals generally provided more than enough data for analysis (Creswell, 1998; Manen, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Van Polkinghorne, 1989). This study attempted to use nine participants, but one withdrew for personal reasons. Consequently, only eight individuals participated in this study.

Interviews were the primary data collection method of phenomenological research. It was also recommended by several phenomenological researchers to use open-ended, structured questions in the interview and allow enough time to explore the phenomenon in great depth (Merriam, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989).
The goal of this process is to put the participants at ease so that the essence of the lived experience can be shared with the researcher (Polkinghorne, 1989; Merriam, 2002). For this study, I conducted personal interviews which lasted approximately one hour with each participant. A concluding interview was held with the group that lasted nearly two hours. The questions for this study were structured and open-ended allowing time for each participant to answer the questions in-depth.

I recorded the interviews and then had the data transcribed by a professional transcriber. This allowed me to return to the data during the analysis process as many times as necessary to assure that all of the essence and meaning was captured during this process. This also led to the development of themes and sub themes which helped me categorize the data and share it with the reader.

Data Analysis Procedures

“The aim of phenomenological inquiry is to reveal and unravel the structures, logic, and interrelationships that are obtained in the phenomenon under inspection” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 50). Data analysis happens throughout the data collection process and continues until the research is complete. A key element to data analysis is the treatment of the data for analysis. Creswell (1998) suggests using “Horizontalization of the data” which means the researcher will find statements about how each participant experienced the phenomenon and list out each significant statement, treating each as having equal value, ultimately
seeking to make a list of non-repetitive statements (p. 147). Merriam (2002) says that “data analysis is an inductive strategy” (p.14).

I interpreted the data following the four guidelines set out by Creswell (1998):

1. Develop a textural description of what happened or of experiences each of these former student leaders have had in leadership development.

2. Develop a structural description of how the phenomenon was experienced by these former student leaders.

3. Develop an overall description of the experience or the essence of their leadership development experiences.

4. Present a narration of the essence of the experiences had by these former student leaders. This will be done by tables, figures, statements, and meaning units. Meaning units are textural descriptions of the experiences including examples (pg. 149).

**Strategies to Ensure the Soundness of the Data**

Creswell (1998) suggests five questions that researchers might ask himself or herself to ensure soundness of the data, they are:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subjects’ descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the actual experience?

2. Is the transcription accurate and does it convey the meaning of the interviewee?

3. Were there conclusions that could have been derived in the analysis of the transcriptions, other than those offered by the researcher?
4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?

5. Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations? (p.208).

The importance of valid data lends credibility to a researcher and the phenomena being looked at. As shown in Table 1, strategies for establishing integrity, validity, and credibility as a researcher were used.

Table 1

*Strategies for Establishing Integrity, Validity, and Credibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>This strategy is a process of using multiple researchers, sources of data, or methods of collecting data to validate or provide consistency in the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Review</td>
<td>This strategy consists of periodically taking the written transcripts or interpretations back to the participants for review, accuracy, and correction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Interview Focus Group</td>
<td>This strategy requires the group of participants to be brought together for a focus group session, after the individual interviews. The intent is to stimulate their thought processes and to make them consider things they have forgotten or had not considered during their sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague Review</td>
<td>This strategy consists of discussing and reviewing research processes, data collection, interpretations, and data analysis with colleagues or peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>This strategy requires that the researcher protect against biases,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this study of student leadership development on community colleges, I used each of the categories mentioned above as a means of establishing a credible study. It provided an opportunity to check the validity and integrity of the research.

Protection of Human Subjects

I completed the requirements set by the Oregon State IRB committee. The standards and requirements set by this body were followed to ensure the protection and well-being of the human subjects involved in this study. As part of the study, each of the participants was asked to sign a consent form and was fully oriented to his or her rights and the scope of the study (see Appendix B). All of the participants signed the consent form. I also contacted the current
administration at Snow College and received written approval before contacting or interacting with any of the former student leaders.

**Personal Disclosure Statement**

Many years ago, as a student at Utah Technical College (UTC) in Orem, Utah (now known as Utah Valley University or UVU), I had a life-changing experience. While attending UTC I was involved in student leadership and as I look back I have come to realize that my student leader experience changed both my career choice and my future. I received a great education in the classroom as well a viable experience as a practicing student leader. My leadership experience at UTC lasted three years, during which time I was the president of the largest club on campus. Later, I was elected by a majority of the clubs to represent them as the Inter-Club Council Chair and as a member of the Student Executive Council. After that great year, I was elected by the students of the college to be the Student Body President. During that time I finished my general education and received a degree in business management. During these three years, I received formal leadership training, had plenty of opportunities to practice hands-on leadership, and was mentored by some great advisors. The compilation of these experiences was life-changing and actually launched me into my career in higher education.

Upon completion of my bachelor’s degree at Brigham Young University, I was hired at Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) as the Director of Student
Activities. Thus my career in leadership development of community college students began.

I realized the powerful influence the leadership program at UTC had on me, and now it was time to turn my attention to developing that same kind of experience for others at SLCC. Over the next 17 years, I watched nearly 75 students each year come into the student government program and leave with various leadership experiences that shaped their lives. I observed change, felt change and knew change had taken place in these students though I could never put my finger on exactly what it was that brought about the change in these students. Many who had gone through our program have graduated, went on a myriad of paths to various careers, and then eventually returned to talk about the experience they had at SLCC. They often discussed how the leadership development at SLCC was real and was often reflected in their career paths. They pointed to the leadership development program as a key aspect of their undergraduate education.

The countless experiences that I have observed and the number of former student leaders that I have been privileged to hear from have caused me to want to understand how, why, and when this leadership phenomenon takes place in the educational experience at a community college.

As I approached and completed this study, I acknowledged my personal positive bias and have not allowed it to interfere with my research or sway my
judgment as I attempted to capture the lived experiences of the former student leaders in this study. I listened carefully and was objective in my approach so as not to allow my bias to enter in during the process of completing this research.

Time Schedule

The following was the planned time schedule for completing my dissertation:

May 2008  Distribute my portfolio and dissertation proposal to members of my doctoral committee

May 2008  Sit for the preliminary oral exam and defend my dissertation proposal

March 2009  Gain IRB approval for my proposed dissertation study

April to June 2009  Collect the data by interviews

Summer 2009  Analyze the data

April 2010  Complete the final draft of my dissertation

July 2010  Defend the findings of the dissertation

June 2011  Graduation

Summary of Design

A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach was used to understand the lived experience of former student leaders on a community college campus. The phenomenological approach used for this research project was quite
adequate to understand the lived leadership experience of former student leaders. This was a good approach to capture the essence of student leadership development because I began to understand how and where the leadership development actually took place. The greatest part of this qualitative approach is that the leadership development process was shared by former student leaders in their own words.

There were three criteria for the selection of former student leaders to participate in this research. Each participant had to meet all three criteria to be eligible. The criteria were:

- Be a former student leader with a history of participating in the college’s formal leadership development programs.
- Be a former student leader that was involved for at least one year so as to be able to capture their leadership development experience. This will help find those who have demonstrated a commitment to leadership opportunities and development.
- Be a former student leader with experience in student government from at least a chair position or vice president level. This level of participation will demonstrate their commitment to student government and the formal leadership development process.

Eight former student leaders from Snow College were asked to participate in in-depth interviews with a series of questions aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences. With concerns about validity, I thoroughly interviewed these individuals and allowed adequate time for thoughtful responses by the participants. The interviews were taped and then
typed up by a professional transcriber. Each participant was provided a copy and was given time to read and make any corrections or changes, if they desired. All of the participants were satisfied with the results of their interviews. In addition, all of the participants were invited to participate in a final group interview so as to assure that the phenomenon had been thoroughly captured (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Manen, 1998). Five participated in the group interview and the results were transcribed and returned to the participants for review. All of the participants were satisfied with the group interview. This process of member checking adds validity as described above.

From the in-depth interview process, I manually categorized and structured the data from the transcripts. I solicited the help of colleagues especially those who had previously worked with Ph.D. level research. This process was slow and methodical though eventually led to a list of themes and sub-themes. Through this process the true essence of their individual and combined phenomena in leadership development unfolded. It was the intent of this study to provide viable data that will be useful for other student affairs professionals, faculty, and students who may be interested in understanding how student leadership development takes place on a community college campus.
CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION OF CONTEXT

This chapter will provide background information regarding the development of the students’ leadership skills and abilities as well as the profiles of each research participant as contextual clues that will help provide a greater understanding of the data that is presented in chapter five. In this chapter, information will be shared about the interview process of the research participants, insight into how the participants gained leadership skills as a student leader and how Snow College helped the participants gain their individual leadership skills and abilities.

From a professional point of view my interest was focused on the process whereby student leaders developed leadership skills and abilities as they participated in student government through formal and informal opportunities provided by Snow College. It is worth mentioning that I have been a professional involved with the student leadership process for 17 years. Although many community colleges may offer student leadership development opportunities, the focus of this research is on how the former student leaders at one particular community college, Snow College, learned leadership skills and abilities and also the process by which they believe they learned leadership as they participated in student government at this Institution.
Snow College History

The history of this two-year community college is remarkable. Snow College is located in Central Utah in the small town of Ephraim. The town was founded in 1888 by settlers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) who understood the importance of continued learning and thus provided for educational opportunities. After reading various stories of the history of this college I learned that from its humble beginnings it has grown into a community college that is well respected in the Utah higher education system. Snow College initially struggled for existence as the school was built entirely with donations from those living in the immediate area, and those settlers had limited financial means for their educational dreams. Newton E. Noyes served as the school’s principal from 1892-1921. Financial difficulties sent Mr. Noyes to plead with LDS church president Lorenzo Snow for financial assistance to help keep the school doors open. With the financial help of the LDS church, the school was able to keep operating and gradually grew into a stable, thriving institution. Eventually the school underwent several name changes and in 1923 the name was changed to Snow College which has remained in place since that time (Christensen, 1988; Phillips, 1977).

Throughout the years Snow College has experienced growth and changes. One major change was when Snow went from being a religiously backed and supported college to a state funded and supported institution. In 1951 the college
became a branch institution of the Utah State Agricultural College, now known as Utah State University (USU), in Logan, Utah. It remained under USU administration until 1969 when it became an independent member of the Utah System of Higher Education. Snow continues to have strong support from the community, alumni, and a dedicated faculty and staff. Those who are affiliated with Snow College express a common feeling that they affectionately call the “Spirit of Snow” (Christensen, 1988; Phillips, 1977).

Snow College operates two campuses, both of which are located in Central Utah in the rural locations of Ephraim and Richfield, Utah. Ephraim is considered the main campus and is home to the administration, sports teams, student housing, library, and many other student services. The college maintains a small student population of around 3000 students giving the faculty the ability to know their students and offer individualized attention. A fairly unique feature about this community college is that many of these students live in campus housing or in local private housing near the Institution. The college provides an intimate and diverse setting for the students who enroll there, offering 64 areas of study. Even though Snow has open enrollment, more than 60% of the incoming students have a high school grade point average of 3.0 or higher, leading to an environment of students who excel and pursue academic excellence. Snow College prepares their students to be motivated, high achieving graduates prepared to enter the work force or transfer at a junior level into most universities.
The specific mission of Snow College is threefold: 1) to educate students, 2) to inspire them to love learning and 3) to lead them to serve others. This research project allowed me to interview eight former students and I was able to see firsthand how aspects of each of the three goals found within the mission of the college came to fruition in the students’ lives.

Snow College Student Government and Student Leadership Development Program

The focus of this section is to give the reader a history of student government since it is the primary reason the student leadership development program existed at Snow College. The historical view will help the reader understand the rich significance that student government has had at Snow College. Beyond the history the other sub-sections will provide the reader with understanding of the student government and the student leadership development program as they existed in relation to the participants of this study. The study participants were involved from 1995 to 2005.

Historical Look at Student Government

Various organizations of student leadership at Snow College have existed for over a century. Student involvement and leadership has quite a lengthy history and evolution dating back to the infancy of Snow College until the present time. Two publications provide a history of student government at Snow College: Snow College; Historical Highlights, the first 100 years, and Snow College History and
Development. From these two publications I created a brief history of student government for background information related to this study. The brief history is as follows (Christensen, 1988; Phillips, 1977):

- In 1892 the first “student society” was organized to increase student interest in science, literature, art, and government.

- In 1907-1908 the first known student body president of Snow College was Otis L. Stewart. This is consistent with records that reveal the student government’s official organization with a constitution on January 31, 1908.

- In 1914 the oldest record mentioning a student government and student body officers appears in the newspaper called The Retainer.

- In 1937 there were the first developments of a Student Senate under the name of a Joint Council that included a Sophomore President and Freshman President. These titles were later changed to representatives.

- In 1959 the student government consisted of an Executive Council (President, Secretary, and two Vice Presidents), Appointed Officers (representatives from the student newspaper, the yearbook, the cheer group, the debate team, as well as male and female students), a Senate Group 1, and a Senate Group 2.

- From 1959 to 1996, the Executive Council and Student Senate remained organizationally consistent with the exception of merging appointed officers into the Executive Council.

- Beginning in 1996 Snow College’s student government offices continued as two main bodies: the Executive Council and the Student Senate.

- In 2003, additional changes were made to the Executive Council which eventually eliminated the Associated Men’s President and
the Associated Women’s President positions. This centralized student activity programming under the direction of the Activities Vice President.

Student Government

Student government at Snow College, during the time of the study, consisted of an Executive and Legislative body of leaders who were elected or appointed depending upon the position they sought. These leaders were allowed to organize and make decisions on matters that pertained to student life, programs, and activities on the campus. Student leaders had fiscal responsibilities for funds raised by student fees and earmarked for student life on campus. They were also responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing student events, activities, and governmental forums.

Students involved in a variety of leadership positions at Snow College were eligible for tuition scholarships as well as opportunities to learn and refine leadership skills. Most Executive Council positions or student body officers as they are sometimes referred to were elected by the general student body. Students could be appointed to various committee and board positions and served under the direction of the Executive Council. Those applying for appointed positions were required to complete a leadership scholarship application and submit a resume. The students were selected through an interview process with the Executive Council and their advisors. These positions could be governmental or activity
oriented and the student could choose to apply for more than one area of emphasis.

Student government offered leaders many training opportunities including a formal leadership class that taught them new leadership skills and abilities. If students chose to be involved as a student leader, they were required to participate in the formal leadership education classes, conferences, and retreats. The formal leadership class was taught twice a week. The goal of this class was to teach leadership principles by focusing on the development of students personal and group leadership skills. They also were mentored and taught by professional student government advisors as they performed their student government duties. These professional advisors taught the leadership class, organized leadership oriented conferences and retreats as well as engaged student leaders in other leadership development experiences.

Without exception the research participants expressed deep appreciation for the leadership opportunities they received by participating in the student leadership development program and from the two professorial advisors who oversaw the program. Many told story after story of the opportunities these advisors provided for their learning. They shared stories and examples of lessons learned both in and out of the classroom that helped them to gain and refine their skills in leadership.
The student leadership development program was organized to support and train student leaders within student government. By design, this program provided student leaders with opportunities to learn leadership in a formal and informal setting while participating in student government. The program created opportunities to learn leadership through structured experiences. The program as part of student government was a recognized department on campus with budgets, policies, staff, volunteers, and a mission to represent and serve the general student body. The day-to-day operation of the department combined with their student government responsibilities provided the student leaders daily unstructured leadership experiences. Structured and unstructured experiences were teaching tools used within the student leadership development program. An example of a structured experience might be a bridge building contest in small groups with a debriefing afterwards. An example of an unstructured experience might be handling a complaint from a student about the cost of education and why student fees are so expensive.

The following are the expectations and outcomes of the Student Leadership Development Program at Snow College provided by the former advisors to the program.

- *Transition building* Avoid mistakes by building upon achievements of your predecessors.
• *Historical knowledge and networking with an experienced person (mentor).* New officers are encouraged to look to the previous officer as a mentor. In addition, previous officers are given the charge to advance their leadership to the new level of a mentor regardless of their transition destination. They are challenged to serve as a friend and resource to the new officers in order to preserve the momentum and direction of continual improvement.

• *Expectation information* A heavy emphasis is placed on learning the “nuts and bolts” of office and student government. This includes training and instruction on how to be an effective student leader at Snow College. Student leaders will review of the student leader contract and performance expectations, physical environment familiarity, and introductions to associated building staff and other support personnel.

• *General leadership training and skill development* Student leaders will be taught leadership skills throughout the year and expected to apply them daily as part of fulfilling their student government responsibilities. Leadership skills will be taught in both formal and informal settings such as class, conferences, workshops, retreats, etc.

• *Networking* Opportunities for association with student officers from other Utah Colleges and Universities for shared learning and potential project or program collaboration.

• *The concept of leadership as a legacy* The concept that by being a student officer at Snow College, they now enter an elite fraternity/sorority of leaders with the charge to continue their leadership and service after graduation or transferring to another College or University.

• *Intimate group networking* Each student leaders is encouraged to work in small groups to build a relationship in order to understand different work styles and establish informed, viable working relationships.
• **The concept of service in leadership** Student leaders are expected to serve their constituents at Snow College. Learning to make a difference in others’ lives is an important leadership trait. Using one’s position of power and influence to help those who need support or service in some way.

• **Experiential learning** Structured and unstructured experiences will provide opportunities to teach and reinforce leadership skills and abilities. Conferences, retreats, and other activities are planned to have the student leaders’ work and interact with each other in a variety of settings. Many experiences will happen as part of your responsibilities in student government.

• **Reflective learning** Student leaders will be given opportunities to reflect on activities and experiences that happen during their student government experience. Reflection through debriefing will allow the student leader to apply to the leadership skills learned formally to the experience or activity that just took place. Journal writing is expected and will be included as a part of each debriefing session.

The student leadership development program was administered by two full-time professional advisors who were also adjunct faculty members and taught the student leadership development class. The student leadership development program was an integral part of student government at Snow College.

*Professional Student Government Advisors*

The former Dean of Students and the former Director of Student Life and Leadership were the professional student government advisors and the adjunct faculty members who taught the leadership class to the participants involved in this study. Snow College has gone through some organizational changes in the
past several years and placed new professionals in both of the positions described above. Neither of the new professionals have had any previous involvement with the participants selected for this study therefore they were not included. For the sake of anonymity in this study, the former Dean of Students will be called Spencer and the former Director of Student Life and Leadership will be called Julie. Spencer and Julie were selected by the administration to be the full-time professional advisors for student government. They have a combined total of more than 20 years experience in student leadership development, student government and teaching leadership.

*Student Government Leadership Class, Conferences and Retreats*

Formal leadership training took place at Snow College. The class was designed as part of the student leadership development program at the College. Everyone involved with student government was required to take the class. Learning outcomes were set for each semester as mentioned above. The leadership class spoken of in this study was a 2 credit hour class known as General Studies 107R fall semester (Personal Leadership) and General Studies 108R spring semester (Group Leadership). The class was taught by the professional student government advisors who were also considered adjunct faculty members by Snow College (see Appendix C for example of syllabus).

Additional formal leadership training during this time consisted of a training retreat known as “the Mexico trip”. This retreat occurred every August,
prior to fall semester, until 2003 when the trip was moved to May in order to accomplish the necessary formal training and bonding between student body officers prior to summer break. In addition, all student body officers attended the statewide Utah Leadership Academy each May in order to receive excellent leadership training and networking experiences with other college student body officers. This also gave the student body officers another opportunity to receive additional formal leadership training with other student leaders from around the state. Additional retreats and/or leadership training experiences are planned under the discretion of respective student body presidents and student government advisors.

The Research Project Background

The Participant Selection Process

Spencer and Julie helped me identify possible candidates for this study. They provided a lengthy list of former student leaders who could be considered. After several conversations, nine names were selected from the list and one dismissed herself for personal reasons unrelated to the topic of this study. The former advisors gave consideration to things such as:

- Were the former student leaders still in Utah and was their last known location a reasonable drive for the researcher?
- Attempt to select former student leaders from different years.
- Would the candidate be willing to participate in a study such as this?
• Attempt to select candidates who held different positions within student government?

• Is there a balanced ratio of male and female candidates?

The items considered above narrowed the pool of potential candidates. The eight candidates that were selected for the study rose to the top of the list based on how they measured up to the items mentioned above.

*The Interview Process*

The interviews were conducted in various locations in Utah convenient for the participants. The interviews took place in public library conference rooms, in workplace offices, and one interview was conducted at a community park. The interviews were conducted during the months of April, May, and June 2009. The participants were given the specific interview questions in advance so they were aware of the questions that would be asked (see Appendix D for list of interview questions). Each participant provided a variety of responses to the interview questions. There were both men and women participants who had completed their schooling at Snow College and had moved on to other aspects of their lives. Some participants left the state for employment and other opportunities but eventually returned and have since established their homes in Utah. The participants have been alumni for as little as four years up to as many as fourteen years. The alumni aspect was an important component of the study. The goal was to allow enough
time to pass to give the participants the opportunity to gain perspective on their experiences as student leaders and the leadership development process.

After completing the individual interviews, the participants were asked to come together for a group interview. This combined interview helped me gain additional insight into the participants’ leadership experiences as they shared those insights with the rest of the group. The goal of the group interview was to help the participants remember additional leadership experiences or insights that they could share with me. This process worked well and added to the richness of the data already gathered. It also confirmed to me that the data was saturated when I started hearing some of the same information and stories over again. Additional validation came as those participants who attended the group interview nodded in agreement or verbally agreed when a story or experience was shared.

Profiles of the Participants

(Note: Participants were not asked any specific questions that were demographic in nature. They self-reported all information which is shared below.)

The participants were eight previous Snow College student leaders (four women and four men) ranging in age from the early twenties to the early thirties. The participants held various student leadership positions while attending Snow College ranging from four to fourteen years ago. The participants reflected on their leadership development opportunities having had time away from their experience as student leaders at Snow College. Currently they are at various
stages of their lives, education, or careers which have given them different perspectives to reflect upon their experiences at Snow College. While they all currently live in Utah, several have lived out of state and then moved back for various reasons since their tenure as student leaders. None of the former student leaders reside in the local community that surrounds Snow College. To give anonymity to each participant involved in the study I have used pseudonyms. They are: Sasha, Mary, Kevin, Mindi, Angie, Ted, Tracy, and Brett.

Sasha served as the Executive Vice President over the Student Senate in 2001-02. Prior to her participation at Snow College, she was involved in student government in junior high and high school as well as a member of the volunteer council for her local Chamber of Commerce. She came to Snow College having already experienced leadership.

After serving as the Student Body Executive Vice President, she left Snow College with a better understanding of leadership. She also learned the importance of teamwork and cooperation to get the job done successfully. In our conversation she said that as she served as a student leader she became more aware of the impact she was having on people instead of the impact she was having on events or activities. She confided that throughout the school year she became more aware of the difference she was making as a student leader. Sasha reflected on her student government advisors while she was involved and said that she could look at them and “see that they demonstrated what they were teaching.” Sasha has
continued to have a keen interest in community service and currently holds a leadership position on the local County Fair Board.

Mary served as the Senate Secretary and as the Student Body Vice President at Snow College during the early 2000s. She had leadership opportunities in her youth while serving on community and school committees in such capacities as Youth City Council and the Drama Club Council. She felt like she came to Snow College with a basic idea of what leadership consisted of from her involvement as a youth.

Mary then spoke about her knowledge of leadership that she gained during her experience at Snow College. Our interview included topics such as organizing, managing and working together with people. She explained that her ability to problem solve and to trust her own moral compass were skills that she learned while in Snow College student government and became very important to her. It was while she was at Snow College serving in student government that she had to decide where her boundaries were and what she was willing to do for others. As a result of this she felt that she learned to become more responsible.

Mary talked about the required student leadership class. She said “I love that class and I still use it today” (Mary). She expressed a couple of times how the program and class impacted her and how she has chosen to work at another university as a result.
Before attending Snow College, Kevin had experienced leadership as he served in his high school senate. He explained that he had never been content remaining on the sidelines watching and always wanted to be involved in a variety of activities. Kevin was a young man who had learned to be very resourceful as a means to attend college. He was not afraid of hard work and looked for experiences that would help him obtain the resources he needed to further his college education.

Kevin served as the Snow College Associated Students Men’s President during the mid 1990s. He told me that it was the mentoring of his student government advisors that changed his life forever. He said, “they really challenged us as student leaders to look beyond ourselves and critically think and create new ideas” (Kevin). He also learned that leadership is a “growing process” and that a person doesn’t ever completely “arrive” as a leader, because there is always something to learn from and new ways to grow. Kevin told me about leadership skills that he and other the student leaders were fortunate enough to learn at Snow College that had helped them to become mature leaders today.

Mindi experienced leadership in her youth. Prior to entering Snow College Mindi was involved in various committees in high school. She was also involved in her church youth programs, serving in different leadership positions. From her experiences in high school and her church participation she learned the value of
hard work and the importance of organizing successful activities. Although, she said that her leadership experiences had been “pretty basic” up to that point.

Mindi served as a Snow College Student Senator during the late 1990s. She explained in our interview that “all of the things that I do now, I feel like Snow was such a foundation for that....” Mindi continues to use her learned leadership skills and abilities as she serves on various boards in her local community, as well as the Miss Utah Pageant.

Angie was involved in Snow College student government in the late 1990s. She served as a Student Senator and as the Executive Vice President over the student senate. Prior to entering Snow College she lived in a small Nevada community. Angie felt that living in a small community gave her more opportunities for leadership. In fact, she held a leadership position every year from her 6th grade until 12th grade with the exception of her 11th grade year.

Instead of involvement in leadership during the 11th grade she had the opportunity to live in Germany as a foreign exchange student. Her hard work and experience in high school gave her the confidence to become involved on a college level. She expressed that she felt like she had a “well-rounded experience” coming out of high school. Angie said she loved being involved and loved learning how to be a leader. She knew she could continue learning leadership skills at Snow College and said, “I felt like I could still be everything I wanted to
be because the opportunities were so many on a residential community college campus like Snow” (Angie).

Ted served as Student Body President at Snow College during the early 2000s. Ted also served as the Student Body President of his high school so he had experienced the joys and frustrations of leadership before attending college. Ted shared that if he had to use two words to describe himself they would be “confidence” and “patience.” He said that these qualities were developed at a young age while he helped with his family’s cattle operation and worked in the field of construction. He learned that these two qualities helped him immensely while he fulfilled his duties in student government.

He felt like many of the experiences he had while in college shaped his knowledge and understanding of leadership. Ted believed that Snow College student government was the reason that he had learned so much about leadership. He expressed that as he mingled on a day-to-day basis with the other student leaders and the student advisors he was taught many skills not only by their words, but also by their examples. He was passionate as he expressed that as he watched them fulfill their duties he found himself wanting to emulate these same leadership skills and to excel in his position as Student Body President.

Tracy was involved in Snow College student government during the mid 2000s. He served as the Executive Vice President over the Student Senate and then as a result of a leadership change, he served the rest of the year as the
Student Body President. Prior to his involvement at Snow College he was involved in high school sports. He stated that as he played on athletic teams and served as a team captain for some of these teams he learned many things about being a leader. Tracy also continued to learn and build upon these skills as he served as a missionary for his church.

Tracy described himself as having a strong work ethic. He had learned to work hard at a young age while helping his family run their dairy farm. Three particular leadership traits Tracy believes he had before entering college were making decisions under pressure, good communication skills, and a strong work ethic. He said “I think each of those, however, were greatly enhanced through my, through Snow College and the leadership program” (Tracy).

Brett was involved at Snow College in the early 2000s. He served as President of the Service Club and the Student Body President. Like all of the research participants interviewed, Brett had been involved in leadership positions in high school. He had been the team captain of his high school football team and the Student Body President. Brett believes it was through these experiences that he learned the importance of setting goals and teamwork. He served as a missionary for his church where he learned to work with others who had similar ideals and also with people whose ideals were very different from his.
Brett said of his Snow College experience, “I would say that it totally changed how I looked at leadership and hard work and getting people involved and respecting others” (Brett).

Myself, the Researcher

Consistent with the methodology associated with phenomenological inquiry, it is also important to consider the profile of the researcher. As the researcher I have over 20 years experience in student leadership development and student government on a community college campus. This extensive background provided a filter to interpret the data that emerged from the interviews with the candidates. This background gave me insight and an understanding to engage the conversation with the participants. The essence of a phenomenological study is to have the participants tell the entire story so the data is complete or saturated. The goal then is to give the reader a greater understanding and insight into the process of student leadership development in a community college setting such as Snow College. Also, as the researcher, I desire to tell the participants’ stories in the most complete manner possible. Thus my role as interviewer and researcher was managed by actively approaching conversation and dialogue through the eyes of the learner seeking to understand the phenomenon of leadership development at Snow College.
Summary

This chapter presented background information on how this group of students developed their leadership skills and abilities while they were student leaders in student government at Snow College. By providing this information the interpretations of data should be more understandable and give the reader enhanced perspective on how the leadership skills and abilities this group of students were developed while they were student leaders at Snow College. Each study participant entered Snow College feeling like they brought some leadership experience and skills with them. Each of the participants went onto share how the level expectations to perform as a student leader were high and how their personal leadership development accelerated and increased dramatically during their tenure in student government at Snow College.

This information was gleaned through individual and group interviews that ultimately provided insights into what leadership skills and abilities they gained and how they felt they learned these skills and abilities. They also shared insights into how Snow College contributed to this leadership development process.
CHAPTER FIVE

HOW DID LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND ABILITIES DEVELOP

This chapter presents the findings of an analysis of data related to the two research questions stated in Chapter three. Question one: While you were a student leader at Snow College, how did your leadership skills and abilities develop? Question two: While you were a student at Snow College, how did the college specifically contribute to your growth and development? This chapter proceeds by using the participants’ own words as often as possible in order to tell their story, which ultimately addresses the process of how they learned leadership while they were student leaders at Snow College. While interviewing these eight former student leaders and reflecting upon the findings, I found several overlapping characterizations of the data collected. The final chapter will be used to share the parallels found and other implications from the data analyzed. Also, it will be used to discuss potential topics for future research, possible implications for practitioners and to share final remarks.

As described earlier in this study, the qualitative research approach known as phenomenology guided my inquiry. One of the primary goals of this approach is to express the essence or the defining characteristics of a phenomenon. The interview process used was designed to immerse myself into the lived experiences of these former student leaders and to verify how, or if, they learned leadership at Snow College. At its most basic level, the first research question of the study
focused on the essence of their experience in how they developed and refined their leadership skills while they were involved with student government at Snow College.

Themes are often used to describe the structure of human experience in phenomenology. The themes presented in this section provide insight and give shape to the studied phenomena by revealing the depth of the participant experience in regards to the meaning of reflection. For example, the participants reflected on their experiences from the perspective of having had several years pass. This elapsed period has given them time to ponder upon their experiences and has allowed them the perspective of having left Snow College and moved onto additional opportunities in education, careers and families.

In the process of attempting to share the insights of how these former student leaders learned leadership skills and abilities, I found it important to share what the former students learned as part of the process and to explain how they learned it. The two questions are intertwined; one aspect lends support and understanding to the other aspect of the learning process.

*Question One: How did Your Leadership Skills and Abilities Develop?*

In answering question one, the focus is on the students’ personal growth and how they learned leadership perspective. In answering question two, the focus emphasizes how Snow College provided the framework, philosophy and structure or the vehicle that helped shape these participants’ ability to learn leadership in a
community college setting. It is important to remember the redundancy of experiences allowed for addressing both perspectives.

The interviews revealed the following themes that will be used to guide the reader through the myriad of experiences that the participants told me as they explained how they developed their leadership skills and abilities. I, with the help of my colleagues, completed a thematic organization of information from the interviews by a lengthy process of identifying patterns and the interrelated ways of identifying and grouping data as shown in Table 2. Four broad themes emerged from the individual and group interviews, they include: (a) Opportunities, (b) Structured experiences, (c) The influence of mentors, and (d) The formal education process. The four major themes and six sub-themes emerged as I researched and studied the rich data provided by the eight participants. I believe the themes and sub-themes will bring into focus how the principles of leadership were learned and developed by each of these former students.

Furthermore, it is my intent to provide the reader with a deeper insight and understanding of how these former student leaders developed and refined their leadership skills and abilities while they were involved with student government on the college campus.
Table 2

*Summary of Question One and Perspectives of the Student Leaders by Theme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Perspective of Student Leaders</th>
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| Opportunities                   | *Leadership opportunities provided a growing process for student leaders.  
                                     *Opportunities helped develop a foundation for good leaders.                                    |
| Structured Experiences          | *Structured experiences provided a vehicle for learning and change.  
                                     *Structured experiences provided a catalyst for leadership development.                              |
| Mentors                         | *Advisors were powerful student mentors.  
                                     *Mentoring from student advisors helped learning and growth.  
                                     *Student leaders learned that to be mentored by advisors was extremely beneficial.                  |
| The Formal Education Process    | *Leadership classes taught skills that were adapted quickly into practical experience.  
                                     *Conferences and retreats provided valuable education experiences that taught trust, how to build relationships, and the concept of working together as a team. |

*Opportunities*

The first major theme, opportunities, featured three sub-themes: (a) Learning to serve and the changes that take place, (b) Inclusion and putting others first, (c) Learning by doing. The major theme of opportunities was inspired by the
fact that participants chose to put themselves in the environment that would heighten their leadership development experience. Thousands of students attend Snow College each year but very few participate in student government. It has been instituted for several reasons, one of which was to provide leadership opportunities for students by participating in the leadership of the student association while another was to provide opportunities for students to learn leadership skills and principles while they served in their positions.

Learning to Serve and the Change that Took Place

While interviewing the participants I learned that the first sub-theme, learning to serve, was integral in molding and developing their foundation as good leaders. These former student leaders shared how they took advantage of the opportunity to participate at the beginning of their student leadership experience with what they called “Mexico.” Each participant explained that the Mexico retreat became the foundation of their learning the value of service. This experience was a leadership retreat organized by the student government advisors and a Snow College alumnus. This former student leader offered his residence, which is located near the border of Mexico in San Diego County, for the retreat. Many of the students embarked upon the Mexico retreat thinking they would enjoy a week of sun, sand, and entertainment in such abundance as can only be found in Southern California and neighboring Mexico. But the experience ended up being quite different from what they first thought it would be. Ultimately this
different experience, which caused frustration during the retreat, resulted in a
deeper understanding of what it takes to become a respected and dynamic leader.

Kevin, Sasha, and Angie were quite vocal about this learning experience. Kevin
provides a great introduction that helps summarize the entire experience:

The trip consisted of staying at the home of a former student body officer of Snow College. He shared a lot of his experiences of leadership at Snow College and we saw somebody who had kind of been there - done that and walked in our shoes. He owns care centers in San Diego and lives in Mexico. We went to these centers and provided service to these elderly people. I found myself thinking … here I am playing checkers with some 70 year old person and how is this going to teach me to be a better student body officer? Of course Julie and Spencer (advisors) would incorporate the debriefing and we’d talk about each day’s events and what we had done that day. Through these sessions of service and leadership development training with Spencer and Julie I learned that it wasn’t just about going in and playing checkers. We were serving in all different kinds of aspects (Kevin).

Kevin had several reflections from the Mexico trip. One was obvious:

They were not there to enjoy the sunny beaches of Mexico and San Diego. He said, “A real take away from the Mexico trip for me was that we were not being served as student leaders” (Kevin). But he learned a bigger lesson about serving. “We were actually providing the service to our school and student body” (Kevin).

He continued to reflect upon his learning by saying, “It is apparent that the advisors, Spencer and Julie, expected the student leaders would gain a valuable leadership principle from this experience” (Kevin). He felt like that experience set the tone for the entire year. He went on further to say “I’m not sure they could have taught this to us in a classroom, it was such a powerful experience to go and
learn that leadership is not always about being in the forefront” (Kevin). He recognized that as the year progressed he continued to learn:

Being a student body officer wasn’t always about getting up in front of everyone at student activities, leading the crowd, but it was sometimes the quiet hard working behind the scenes times that may not always get recognized that was important. That was a real grounding experience for me and set the tone for the year of service ahead (Kevin).

The beautiful beaches of Mexico and San Diego gave way quite quickly to a powerful learning experience that set the tone for the entire year. Sasha explained it this way: “Titles don’t really mean anything but it is the service rendered. Titles offer power and authority which can provide the opportunity to make a difference in the life of someone else” (Sasha). As Sasha described her experience at the rest home she emphasized, “I was totally out of my comfort zone” (Sasha). Playing checkers with the aging residents she realized “These people could care less that I was a leader at Snow College. That didn’t matter at all. What mattered was what I had to offer them and what I could do to make them feel better about themselves” (Sasha). Then the change came into Sasha’s mind and heart which the advisors hoped would come:

That experience that moment, changed everything for me. All of the goals of what I wanted to accomplish as a leader at Snow College that year changed. I didn’t want people to know my name and title or to remember me for that. I could tell at that moment that that didn’t matter (Sasha).

This was a valuable learning experience for these former student leaders. As Angie participated in the retreat she expressed that she got to know herself on
a whole different level. She said, “I’ve never had service experiences like that before or since and so that was truly, one of the most life-altering experiences I’ve ever had” (Angie). She realized that for her to learn the value of service in leadership it took something organized by the advisors: “I know that’s why they [advisors] did it. I mean they knew that was going to happen” (Angie).

Kevin reflected on how the learning experience unfolded for him. During his reflection, others in the group nodded and laughed as he shared his thoughts: “I cannot tell you how mad I was playing checkers with this old guy…. I could not understand why we were doing this and why we weren’t talking about being student body officers and leaders” (Kevin). At the precise moment when Kevin was most frustrated at his advisor, Spencer asked him, “What did we basically just do today?” (Kevin). I responded by saying, “Well you know, we served these people and it was good” (Kevin). Spencer continued by asking, “What do you think this year is about at Snow College?” (Kevin). With that question, Kevin explained that he started to see how important the element of service is in dynamic leadership. Educating student leaders was not only Spencer’s and Julie’s job, it was their focus throughout the entire year.

While Kevin, Sasha, and Angie described how they had misunderstood the Mexico retreat experience at first, Mindi reflected upon it in a different way. She embarked on the experience feeling like playing on the beach would be great,
though the opportunity to go to the rest home and mingle with the residents would give her “a lasting memory” (Mindi).

Mindi believes that what she learned while engaged in the Mexico service experience continues to help her even today. Even now, as she selects activities to be involved in within her community, she tries to choose those that provide opportunities to serve others which really matter:

And so nowadays, I find myself trying to pick and choose where I spend my time, where I put my energy and my dedication and picking those activities that really matter. I try to choose things that are lasting with other people instead of just self-serving activities (Mindi).

Kevin offered one final reflection of his experience. “I think if you relate it to today, the biggest part of being a leader is serving others” (Kevin). As Kevin conversed with the other former student leaders he said, “I think that’s ultimately what being a leader at Snow College was about, was serving the school and serving the student body and representing people” (Kevin).

The Mexico experience seemed to have a significant impact on their journey of learning about leadership. The service experience was intentional and had been well-planned by their advisors. All of the study participants mentioned the Mexico trip and reiterated their learned outcome as those quoted above.

*Inclusion by Putting Others First*

Several of the interview participants shared experiences of how they learned the importance of including and involving as many students as they could
while they were student leaders on campus. Specifically, Sasha and Mindi shared experiences that had a significant impact in their lives. Sasha shared her stories of how she learned the importance of putting her fellow students ahead of herself in her leadership role. When she decided to run for student office she solicited the support of those that lived in her apartment complex to help with her campaign. She recalled how well it worked and she wanted to try it again. After she was hired in the International Center she got to know many of the students there. Sasha recalled after she got to know them, she realized how much they had to offer:

As a student leader, I wanted everyone to experience Snow College and all of the great things we had to offer…. That was a great leadership experience for me to go out and get to know all these different types of people. And without my leadership experience, I wouldn’t have felt the obligation to do that…getting to know those people not only enriched my life, but I think helped Snow in general because everyone felt a part (Sasha).

Sasha learned how including the silent majority is a powerful tool for good as a leader. As a student leader she believed in her fellow students. She went on to explain, “At Snow College I learned that a leader is somebody who, rather than stand on the pedestal, the leader is the pedestal to build others up. I became much more aware of the difference that I could make as a student leader” (Sasha). As Sasha experienced the positive effects of essentially being the leader behind the leader she caught the vision of how this concept enriched the entire school for everyone:
And so I learned that even people that seem like they might be insignificant or that they might be indifferent, you know the apathetic, that there’s a place for everybody and something might spark them to get involved (Sasha).

Mindi learned the value of serving others and making them feel a part of the larger Snow College experience. She explained how she learned this concept over and over throughout the year. “This was so powerful to me because these are the memories that I have kept…. And these are the memories that change who you are” (Mindi). As Mindi remembered some of the barbeques the student leaders sponsored for the student body she said. “We were a big part of cooking, serving, mingling, and trying to get the student involvement up. Those were the times that I remember thinking I’m making a difference” (Mindi).

At Snow College serving others as a student leader was taught and emphasized as an important leadership skill. Sasha and Mindi both learned and quickly came to understand the value of this concept.

*To Learn by Doing*

Student government not only taught them how to become leaders, it also gave them opportunities to practice the new skills and abilities they were learning. Kevin, Mindi, and Sasha shared experiences of how participation afforded them many learning opportunities, including the daily interaction with their student government advisors. “Leadership is a growing process. I don’t think that you’ve ever really ‘arrived’ as a leader, there is always something to learn and grown
from” (Kevin). The advisors knew that these student leaders were learning and that they had come to the college with varying sets of skills. The advisors wanted to challenge their thinking and did so almost daily. Kevin remembered how his advisor Spencer taught this point:

Spencer always encouraged us to ask questions so we would understand...specific policies or issues that were facing the school. Then he would turn around and encourage us to ask ourselves does it have to be this way? Or can we challenge what’s happening here...this was something that I had never experienced (Kevin).

The participants shared how they learned leadership through handling conflict, conducting leadership meetings, and the uncomfortable experience of getting outside of their “comfort zones” (Mindi). She explained:

I came out of my comfort zone by the experiences I had in the Student Senate and with the people I worked with. I don’t think I ever would have done that before, but I knew I could do it and I knew that it would be a good experience because it was something new (Mindi).

From time to time they faced difficult situations where they had to resolve conflict. This was a skill that was a little harder to learn for most of the student leaders. Sasha told how she began learning this skill:

I remember one time there was a conflict on the council and I spoke privately with the person that was affected. Afterward, Spencer mentioned to me one day, offhand, that I had handled the situation well or something like that. And just having him point out specific things that I was learning helped me to see how much I was growing and it helped me want to foster more of those kinds of experiences and utilize them in my life (Sasha).

Brett recalled learning some important leadership skills as he attended meetings with other student body presidents from other institutions in Utah. He
remembered how some other student body presidents wanted to dominate the conversation and not listen to what others in the group had to say:

These experiences helped me to better conduct the weekly student government meetings at Snow College. Every Monday all the officers would eat lunch together, discuss our plans and events for the week. From the meetings with the student body presidents, I saw how many of the presidents felt left out, like they didn’t have a voice. I made it a point to include everyone in my own meetings (Brett).

Such experiences were valuable for all of these former student leaders; they were able to learn as they were involved with campus life activities, fellow student leaders, and their student government advisors.

Structured Experience

The second major theme that described the experience for these former student leaders is presented within two sub-themes: “student government” and “other experiences.”

Student Government

These student leaders were learning and encountering new ideas and challenges by learning to work together and with their leaders. Many of these experiences were new to them and required the student leaders to think in new ways. While all of these former student leaders were involved with their community and student government before college, they learned that student government is much more involved and demanding on a college level. Mary said:
“You get to college and it’s hey, we have to pass this state budget…. You weren’t just fighting for, let’s have a fun dance” (Mary).

These students shared what learning took place as they were involved directly with student government. They used words such as “hard work” and “respect” to characterize their experience. “I would say that it [student government] totally changed how I look at leadership and hard work and getting people involved and respecting others” (Mary). These former student leaders appreciated their experience and the trust placed in them by the student body and their advisors. “I hope you realize that it is hard to explain to someone who hasn’t experienced what we have gone through. It is something that cannot be taught or learned in a classroom” (Kevin). Kevin then explained at length how he and other student leaders were taught how to think through a problem or policy critically. They were given opportunities to explore issues and then come up with an answer or direction that they would pursue as a council:

I remember sitting in student council meetings and Spencer would literally sit back and let us make the decisions. And we would just beg for him to tell us what to do. (group laughs) And then he would not give in. And that was really a developmental point for a lot of us because he, he just wouldn’t step in and made us run our meetings, made us ask the critical questions that we needed to asked, made sure we were looking at it from all perspectives and eventually we came to the right decision. Eventually we came to the decision that he could have probably told us was the right answer two hours earlier or whatever it was. But that was a pretty formal process that a lot of us hadn’t gone through (Kevin).
This is a great example of how as a group they learned important leadership skills; such as critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork (to name just a few).

The desire of these student leaders to have a positive impact on the Snow College campus was evident as they continued to find ways to work together and work out solutions to difficult situations.

Mindi learned a valuable lesson on inclusion of others in leadership:

I remember having someone on Senate with us that was the secretary that wanted the same duties as the rest of us. And I remember fighting that internally because we had all ran for election and I was caught up in the titles and the, what do you call it, entitlement I guess. And I remember Julie [advisor] being a good example teaching us, just to involve everybody and it didn’t matter. We were all a team now and it didn’t matter. We were all there to do the same thing. Once I accepted that, she was really good too. She was awesome, such a hard worker. And it didn’t make a difference because in the end it was just the results that mattered (Mindi).

Mindi also realized that inclusion helps with the end product, and the end product is what is really important as a leader.

*Other Experiences from Being Involved*

The participants talked about their personal experiences while involved in student government. It seemed to be a catalyst for leadership development for them. They all spoke fondly of student government and how it helped bring about change and growth in their lives. Speaking on her experiences in student government, Mary said, “A lot of the things that I learned were through
experience. The things that I learned there have been a really good base and really
good foundation for everything else that I’ve been able to do” (Mary).

Casey was involved in an unpleasant situation while he was involved in
student government. He talked about how this experience caused him discomfort,
yet it forced him to grow in his leadership role:

I started out as the Executive Vice President, that’s what I campaigned for
and won. About a month into the year… the [student body] President was
impeached and I was asked to fill that role now, to step up, it didn’t set
well with the student body for a number of reasons. We weren’t going to
tell everybody the exact reasons why the President was impeached you
know for confidentiality… A lot of times a problem at a community
college is just apathy. People aren’t real concerned about government, let
alone student government. But they were all of a sudden real concerned.
There was a lot of pressure from a lot of different areas, just a lot of
questions. Quite a bit of anger and just wondering what was going
on… that really taught me to handle myself. I had to step up and take some
heated questions and do it all with a level head and do it with a calm, sort
of presidential demeanor. Say that everything’s OK and this is what has
happened and this is why. I just remember the day that we had our big
open meeting to announce what was going on. We filled the student
center, which is kind of remarkable in a small junior college with a couple
thousand kids… that’s a specific experience that taught me leadership, but
specifically how to handle myself in a pressure situation (Casey).

Casey learned he was becoming a very capable leader as he worked through a
tough problem that was literally forced upon him.

Mary was on the Executive Council with Casey and she was also very
involved in the situation described above. She described how she had a leading
role as a member of the Executive Council in addressing the impropriety of the
former student body president. She reflected on how this particular challenge
taught her several valuable lessons in working with others skeptical of the
decisions that government leaders often have to make. She described how she
learned to deal with difficult situations and how to pay attention to detail:

I learned how to deal with difficult situations in a leadership position. I
took a lot of heat because of a situation that we had while I was there. I
took a lot of heat and I had to learn to deal with people… So I learned how
to cross my t’s and dot my i’s… I learned the people management portion
of leadership (Mary).

She went on to emphasize more specifically how her leadership experience helped
her grow in student government. She said, “The life lessons that I learned were a
lot more poignant and a lot more effective in developing my character than those
classes have ever been” (Mary).

Mary felt, just like the other participants did, that the experiences she had
while she was involved with student government gave her a foundation for their
future. She said, “The skills that I learned there… have helped me really get into
the meat of my career and my [future] education” (Mary).

The former student leaders’ new-found leadership skills and capabilities
came directly from their participation in student government. In a very different
student government experience, Casey learned another set of valuable skills. He
learned how to act as a leader when placed in a leadership role. Several of the
participants spoke of associating with the President of the Snow College while in
student government and how influential that was on them. “It was an extremely
good opportunity to rub shoulders with…the president of the college” (Casey). He
continued to speak about this experience and what it meant to learn from someone who was as highly respected as the chief administrator of Snow College. He discussed this further and expanded the conversation to include other college presidents and student body presidents from the state of Utah. They all had an influence on Casey as he was shaping his personal leadership skills. He shared this insight:

I had the opportunity to go to meetings on the state level with Presidents of other colleges and other student body presidents…that was priceless to be able to see these gentlemen and see how they carried themselves. You can’t help but learn from that, and want to carry yourself that way (Casey).

Casey’s experience has been mentioned in this section under student government to shed light on the opportunities afforded these young people by their participation in student government. It was obvious that Casey, because of his position with student government, was able to associate with other leaders who, by their example, helped him further develop his skills as a leader. The President of Snow College and other influential leaders had an impact on Casey’s personal leadership development. Several other study participants spoke of similar experiences that influenced their personal leadership development.

The third major theme “The Influence of Mentors” is devoted to the topic of the study participants association with others and the impact it had on shaping their leadership skills.
The Influence of Mentors

It is obvious that other people influence our lives, especially in our formative years. The participants had been surrounded by professional advisors and others who taught them, both by example and by word, how to be good leaders. The participants all mentioned the influence and help that advisors, administration, faculty, and others had on their experience as student leaders. This particular theme will attempt to support the positive influence the advisors had on the participants’ personal experiences.

The participants all shared several stories and experiences about their advisors, Spencer and Julie. Sasha described her experience and tried to explain the positive influence they had in her life:

You know, I can’t say enough good about the advisors. And my guess is that most people involved in student government would say the same thing. You know, you look at your advisors like they’re just neat people (Sasha).

Although each participant’s experiences were different, they all described a common feeling of deep respect for their advisors. The participants felt like their advisors had spent many additional hours to teach them and guide their leadership experience. Casey described himself and the others in his group as immature. He continued, “We were 21 at best, and you have a long way to go” (Casey). But the advisors were there to help them grow. “And your mind is in a state that you’re
learning very quickly. You almost change every day…So to be around your advisors is extremely beneficial” (Casey).

The participants continued to reflect upon their experiences with their advisors and what their experiences meant to them. Kevin shared an experience about an important decision that had to be made in his personal life which would affect his leadership role at the College. He counseled with his advisor, Spencer. It was obvious that Kevin had great trust in and respect for Spencer as he sought his advice on this big decision:

   I remember spending many hours with Spencer debating what to do with this scenario placed before me. I wanted to stay involved with Student government so badly, however I knew that opening this hotel would propel me forward in other ways. Spencer was a great mentor to me during this decision time more so than anyone (Kevin).

The role of the advisor was crucial at this crossroad in Kevin’s personal life, as he was choosing to either embark on a career or continue his education.

Mindi shared a personal experience of how she became aware as a leader of knowing when to lead and when to follow. She had a great relationship with her advisor, Julie, and at a crucial moment that respect turned into a great teaching moment:

   I remember having an experience between myself and Julie. I always loved Julie and had a great relationship. But I remember maybe pushing her limits a little bit over. I just remember having that one moment with her where I felt like I had let her down. And that was a powerful thing for me because I learned how important it was to really respect the people that are in charge and to learn from them how to follow. And we were leaders,
but we also needed to be followers in their program and what they were trying to do (Mindi).

Mindi learned that a good leader is also a good follower. Her trust and respect for Julie helped her to come to that realization. She learned a valuable leadership lesson from that interaction with her advisor.

The influence of good student government advisors played a key role in each of the participant’s leadership development process. Many of the experiences mentioned so far have been informal and personal in nature. However the advisors did also use formal settings to help develop the leadership abilities of these former student leaders. This structured training included the required leadership class, retreats and conferences. The final theme and subsequent sub-themes demonstrates the formal education process that was part of the student government program.

The Formal Education Process

The participants were asked how the formal leadership training helped their personal leadership development. They shared several personal experiences which demonstrated the positive role that formal training had their leadership development. The following accounts share their personal growth from the formal training that they received. (Note: As part of question two, additional information will be shared when it relates to the institution’s perspective and how it impacted the student leaders.)
The Leadership Class

Snow College created a leadership class and required all student government and club leaders to attend this class during their term in office. The class was taught by Julie, one of the student government advisors. This put Julie and the student government leaders in a setting that allowed for structured and guided formal learning. The relationship Julie already had with the study participants helped them learn from valuable personal insights. Mindi shared one such personal moment with Julie, where she felt that she had learned something.

“And Julie made us do journal entries. She would write comments on all of our journal entries. In those small, private moments was when I really learned. Because I knew, I was honest with her and she was honest with me” (Mindi). This honest exchange in the formal classroom setting helped motivate Mindi to want to be a better person and student leader. She said, “I just learned how to be a better person. I remember just listening; her approach was so good and just wanting to be a better person. I wanted to give more to the people around me and be the best that I could be” (Mindi). The classroom relationship and formal teaching of leadership had an impact on Mary also. She said, “I love that class and I still use it today” (Mary). She told me of learning teambuilding as a leadership skill, and how it has stuck with her in her current leadership endeavors:

Julie taught us about forming, storming and norming. That’s what happens to a group every single time a group gets together. And I still use that today when I get into new relationships or when I get new leadership
positions. Because of my major I do a lot of different leadership things. And I still use a lot of the activities and the things that we learned in that class. I think the reason I still use them is because I enjoyed the class so much (Mary).

Mary was able to explain how she learned leadership skills in the classroom.

Sasha also shared a specific skill she learned in the classroom and was able to immediately put to good use as a student leader. She said, “We learned about brainstorming ideas and how to do things like that. And I remember using what she taught us and taking it right into our office and saying let’s hash this out” (Sasha). The participants adapted leadership skills quickly and put them into practical experience. This provided a good example of how the formal classroom experience influenced Sasha’s leadership development.

Mindi echoed a similar experience in gaining skills from the leadership class:

I also remember a lot of lessons we had on character building and trait building. And we learned a lot. I remember a lesson, I can’t remember the details, but I remember it being on forgiveness, how important forgiveness was in that we’re all learning and we’re all trying to build our character and it’s really hard to work. There was a group of us and we didn’t all get along and we all had really different personalities. And it was really important to learn how to work with other people and it’s ok to disagree (Mindi).

Even though years had passed Mindi still remembered the topic and concept taught. She also remembered how the leadership concept was applied to a specific situation within student government. These experiences are good examples of how the participants learned leadership in the classroom and then applied it. Julie,
the advisor and teacher, used her position to teach leadership principles. Her influence as an advisor and mentor had a great impact on these former student leaders.

*Conferences and Retreats*

The final sub-theme of this section looks at another aspect of formal education including how key people influenced the learning process within the participants. Advisors planned conferences and retreats at different stages of the student government experience. This gave the advisors another opportunity to focus on certain leadership skills or abilities that they felt were needed at the time. The advisors tried to use variety of different teaching methods in an effort to get the student leaders to look beyond their own world experiences. For example, Ted said, “People don’t always do stuff how you want it done…Yeah, I just learned that people are different” (Ted). Ted continued to explain about an activity he took part in during one of the retreats:

> We built bridges out of toothpicks. I grew up doing construction. And so in my mind, this bridge needed to have a big beam and then you know, needed some trusses or kind of a truss system. And I thought well, that will be strong. We were on two teams and I thought we were going win. But there was another guy in the group that had an idea to scissor them, to glue them scissored…. Honestly, the way he built it was much stronger than mine ever would have been. I kind of took from that well, you know, we all have different ideas and there’s not always one way and my way’s not always the right way (Ted).

As each of the participants talked about the retreats it was apparent that the learning experience Ted had was common.
Sasha shared a very different learning experience she had during one of these conferences:

The presenter that year was homosexual and that was something that I was prejudice towards. When I heard what he taught me and I listened to his story, I learned that I could learn positive things from people whose morals I didn’t agree with...he taught me things that I knew to be true, even though I didn’t agree with his lifestyle necessarily. So that was a good life lesson for me to learn (Sasha).

Sasha went on to explain what skills she felt like she learned from this experience:

Tolerance and I want to say teamwork, but that sounds cliché because that’s not really what I mean. I mean when you’re on a council together, that all of these people come from all different backgrounds and you may not agree with each other at all. But if you have the same goals and you have mutual respect, then good can come of it. I learned that by listening to him [the presenter] that year (Sasha).

Sasha learned a very important skill in valuing other people and what they have to bring to the table. Tolerance is a very important leadership skill that made a lasting impression on her.

The conferences and retreats were often held away from the college, sometimes in remote areas, such as the Mexico retreat was. When we discussed the value of retreats, Angie brought up one retreat she was involved with and said, “We were so secluded from everything...we were just there on this beach in this house” (Angie). They were encouraged to open up to each other and share who they were:

We went around and really dug deep down into, you know, why we are where we are, why we think the way we think and why we value what we value. And it was so neat to be able to connect with all of those people that
I was going to be spending the next year with, to really understand and appreciate them as a person (Angie).

Angie learned the importance of trust in building relationships. The advisors understood this concept and knew the value of getting everyone to learn to work together.

Mindi shared an experience that she believes was purposely set up by the advisors at a retreat. She said, “And honestly looking back now, I chuckle because I think we were set up, and I don’t know how they did it. We might have been put in groups randomly, but I’m suspicious now” (Mindi). She recalled how she was put into a group that was hard for her, because the members of this group really tested her patience. Mindi shared details about this group activity that eventually taught her patience and the power of pulling together as a group to complete a task:

And we had to build this house, or whatever we had to build, and it seemed like we had a time restraint because I remember being stressed about that too. And it was like catastrophic to begin with. I remember being mad. I remember pouting. I remember that by the end we were laughing and having so much fun. I remember that a lot. So there I learned patience and I learned it might seem overwhelming at first, but if you work together, you’ll get through it (Mindi).

In summary, as shown in Table 3, each of these students gained different leadership skills and abilities from participation in the formal educational classes, retreats, and conferences. The advisors, as teachers, played a key role in setting up
the learning experience. Their experience and expertise was apparent in guiding these students through this formable time of their life.

Table 3

Summary of Question Two and the Perspectives of How Snow College Contributed by Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Perspective of Student Leaders</th>
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</table>
| Student government | *Student government provided hands-on experiences that helped student leaders feel valued and empowered.  
*Student government empowered student leaders and taught them how to make a difference in the lives of other students. |
| Culture            | *A culture of invited participation taught students that working together as a team will help them accomplish amazing things.  
*Students at Snow College were encircled by a culture that taught that the student is important to the institution.  
*Student leaders learned that every student had something of value to offer.  
*Students learned how to become leaders through a leadership-driven environment.  
*Advisors were instrumental in helping students learn new leadership principals. |
| Professional Support| *Student leaders learned from powerful examples.  
*Mentorship by advisors allowed students to see themselves as leaders.  
*Advisors set a great example by allowing student leaders to learn by discovery.  
*Advisors taught students to learn and do by practicing leadership principals outside of the classroom. |
*Student leaders believed that Snow College was committed to creating and fostering an environment for learning.
*Students benefitted from an environment that promoted educational experiences and learning in new ways.
*Snow College provided educational opportunities for the student leaders.
*Student leaders engaged in learning opportunities which greatly enhanced their college experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| *Student leaders believed that Snow College was committed to creating and fostering an environment for learning.
*Students benefitted from an environment that promoted educational experiences and learning in new ways.
*Snow College provided educational opportunities for the student leaders.
*Student leaders engaged in learning opportunities which greatly enhanced their college experience. |

*Summary*

The former student leaders provided many personal experiences of how they learned leadership skills while they were student leaders at Snow College. The rich data provided by the participants emerged into four broad themes and six sub-themes that helped give structure to their experiences. The use of the themes and sub-themes in sharing the participants’ lived experiences addressed the initial question “how did your leadership skills and abilities develop?” The next important section of this study is found in question two, which focuses on how the Institution played a role in the leadership development of these former student leaders.

*Question Two: How did Snow Specifically Contribute to your Growth and Development?*

The remaining section of this chapter responds to research question number two which is “how did Snow College specifically contribute to your
growth and development?” As a phenomenological study, my goal was to gain a better understanding of how students were able to learn leadership while they were involved in student government at Snow College. I also wanted to understand how this happens at a community college like Snow College, and specifically how the institution contributed to the leadership growth and development of the study participants. This understanding came as the participants, both individually and as a group, shared their stories and experiences. After toiling through the stories and experiences of the participants, four major themes and nine sub-themes surfaced that detailed how Snow College was involved in this process.

Towards the end of the group interview, which was the final interview held with the study participants; Kevin made a profound overarching statement. He summarized very well the entire environment, culture, and student leadership development which was the focus of Snow College:

For somebody to read this and say, are you kidding me? You know, you were a student body officer at Snow College and it’s now impacted your life, 15 years down the road or 10 years or 5 years or whatever it is. It may sound ridiculous, but it really is not a ridiculous concept to me. It has influenced the way I am as a leader today. It’s influenced the way I live today. I mean people really are influenced I think by the environment here at Snow College; it sure provided that for me. And I think that everybody here on the panel that has lived experiences down here and are changed because of it. And also it has probably set them on a different course than they may have normally gone in life (Kevin).
As these former student leaders talked about their Snow College experience, the four themes that emerged over and over were those of student government, culture, professional support, and education. As a reminder, many of the same themes and sub-themes have surfaced in the responses to both questions. Again, I was keenly interested in understanding how the students learned leadership, which raised the question of how much the students learned by self-discovery compared to how much the institution contributed to that learning process. Thus it is to be expected that some redundancy of statements, themes, and sub-themes would exist as the data was analyzed. You will note that question one focused on the student perspective of how they learned leadership, while question two places emphasis on the role that Snow College had in their leadership development process. The participants helped in this process by identifying or giving credit to the institution, as Kevin’s introduction suggests. The data provided by the participants was rich with their lived experiences and full of examples of how Snow College contributed to their personal leadership development.

**Snow College Student Government Provided Hands-on Experiences**

My first major theme demonstrated how student government at Snow College provided hands-on experiences which contributed to the growth and development in leadership development among these participants.
In one interview Sasha said that as a student leader she was asked to participate on selection committees several times. She shared this about her experiences:

As a student myself, I sat on committees and watched people come in and try out for various positions and interview and present themselves. It definitely gave me a good experience as far as trying to see those skills in other people and recognize those traits in other people (Sasha).

Through this experience she was able to look beyond herself and see how other people presented themselves in interviews. This obviously was a positive experience for her which was provided by the institution.

Mary compared her student government experience in high school to her student government experience at Snow College. It was clear from her description that the expectations set for her in Snow’s student government were much more involved than in high school:

Leadership in high school is all about hey, let’s plan an activity. You get to college and it’s hey, we have to pass this state budget…. You weren’t just fighting for, let’s have a fun dance. You were fighting for; this is hard earned money that we are going be paying towards tuition. Is this really where we want it to go? (Mary).

Snow College valued and expected input from the student leaders about the institution’s budget process. Mary’s experience demonstrated her concern and apparent stress over the cost of tuition and how the funds were spent by the college.
Angie also felt that Snow College valued her input and participation in making college life better for her fellow students. She shared this experience about her interaction with the College:

I sat in a meeting and I wasn’t afraid to share my opinion. And I really felt like what I had to say mattered and would be valued and that I could affect other students’ experience for the positive. We’re going to empower you as student leaders to make this better or to solve this problem or to address this issue. It was just incredible (Angie).

She felt valued to the point her opinion mattered. The institution empowered her to make a difference in the lives of other students. This had a positive impact on her leadership experience. In a very different setting she was placed in an uncomfortable but growing situation that still helped her to grow as an individual. She was asked by her advisors to represent the college and student government in hosting donors of the college at an important institutional function:

Another thing that emphasized that commitment literally was a few months later when they were getting ready to dedicate the Greenwood Student Center, I remember my advisors came to me and said what do you think about hosting the donors? And I remember looking at Julie and Spencer and thinking you’re crazy. These are important people who just gave us a whole lot of money. And they said no, no, no, we really want you to be the one that spends the day with them. And I just thought that’s cool that they really trusted students (Angie).

This experience positively impacted her commitment to the institution. She also learned how to trust and be trusted in leadership. This was an opportunity to learn this important leadership skill that was bestowed on her by her advisors and
administration. This experience had a huge impact on her as she went on further to explain:

And they knew you were going to screw up. Like I’m sure I didn’t say the perfect things the whole day. But the fact that they even asked me to do it in the first place made me feel trusted. I don’t even know, I don’t know a better word to say, but they really did make me feel like I could do it (Angie).

These participants were given different opportunities to develop as student leaders and to serve the institution in important ways.

Student government as a structured experience was common among the study participants. It was the vehicle and setting for many personal leadership growth experiences. This type of development could not have happened for these former student leaders without the vision and support of the institution, which placed a high priority on student leadership development. This leads into the next theme: The institution’s culture. Snow has a shared culture that declares student leadership development to be important to Snow College. Ultimately this institutional culture affected the environment in and around student government which was the vehicle for student leadership development.

Culture

Within the theme of culture are three distinctive sub-themes that describe the culture of Snow College as it relates to student leadership development. The sub-themes are invited participation, the student is important, and leadership driven environment.
Invited Participation

Snow College has created an environment of involvement. It offers a variety of different possible options for student involvement while they attend the college. This involvement includes participation in clubs, student government, sports, recreation, and service projects, to name a few. Students can become involved with student government by being elected or they can be selected to serve on one of many committees through an appointment process.

Mindi gave an excellent example of how Julie, her student advisor, taught her the importance of involving students on campus regardless of being appointed or elected to their position. “I remember Julie, being a good example, teaching us, just to involve everybody” (Mindi). She went on to share an example of a student who was serving on the Senate though wished to be further involved. Mindi explained that at first she believed that if a student was not an elected member of student government they should not have the same level of involvement as an elected officer. She explained how her advisors quietly taught her that titles do not matter and that when students work together as a team, regardless of how they got there, they can accomplish some pretty amazing things:

We were all a team now and it didn’t matter. We were all there to do the same thing. Once I accepted that, she was really good too. She was awesome, such a hard worker. And it didn’t make a difference because in the end it was just the results that mattered (Mindi).
Because of the ample opportunities for student involvement on campus, many students have experiences that they might not have had otherwise. The participants talked about their belief that their choice to attend Snow College led to many opportunities that they may not have had at a larger college or at a university. Mindi felt the involvement changed her life and has a prominent place in her memory of Snow College. She said, “This is the most powerful part to me because these are the memories that I have and that I’ve kept. And these are the memories that change who you are” (Mindi). She gave an example of how the culture of involvement at the College kept her on Campus even on weekends. “I remember never coming home from college because we had activities, or we had parties or we had different things that we were involved with as a group every single weekend” (Mindi).

Several of the participants explained how surprised they were when they realized that most students on campus wanted to be involved. Sasha recalled an experience she had when she decided to run for student office that taught her the value of inclusion:

When I decided to run for office, I mobilized my whole apartment complex and organized this huge campaign and got everyone involved, when I saw what came about because of that, I said hey, that worked and I want to do that again. And so from that experience, I learned… that there’s a place for everybody and something might spark them. Their ideas are valuable and so that was good (Sasha).
The participants continued to talk about being involved and the importance of making other students on campus feel included and that it can make a big difference. Mindi remembered an experience she had with planning and participating in the college-sponsored freshman orientation:

I remember planning the freshman orientation. And that was so fun...I remember how shy those students were when they would come in. And by the time we were finished with orientation, how excited that they were to come to Snow (Mindi).

The institution, with the help of the student leaders, created a culture of fun and inclusion as evidenced by Mindi’s experience with orientation. These former student leaders came to the college and found that participation not only made their experience fun, but they give it credit for some life-changing experiences such as those shared thus far. They also learned it was valuable to include anyone who wanted to be involved. As they did they learned, just as Sasha learned, “There’s a place for everybody” (Sasha).

The Student is Important to the Institution

Each of the participants shared in their interview how they felt that the student was of upmost importance at Snow College. “Julie was wonderful at teaching you stuff like that. Because she really, really believed that everybody brought something valuable” (Angie). As Casey and Angie reflected on their experience, they commented that Snow College had demonstrated to them how students were important to their advisors and the college administrators:
They would not make a decision without us. They didn’t have a committee without students on it. I mean everything took a student into account in some way, shape or form. And they would never do anything unless it was in the best interest of the student (Angie).

As I look back at the overall experience, it was so extremely positive, it’s hard for me to even say it, just a real opportunity. You know, Snow College gave out quite a large number of leadership scholarships to give students different opportunities. Somebody understood that it was an opportunity or an education that you couldn’t create any other way. Just looking back on it… I felt, like going into it, the decision would elevate my life, you know tenfold. But I feel like it elevated my life a hundredfold. You know, after having done it. I have nothing but just extreme positive feelings about it (Casey).

All the participants shared common feelings related to their involvement at Snow College. They felt they were able to break down barriers and become more accepting of other students. Angie also said:

I really, really do credit that Snow College taught me to get rid of the barriers. People are people and they all deserve to be treated with respect and they all matter. And you shouldn’t think that one person matters more than you. Nor should you think that you matter more than someone else (Angie).

Leadership Driven Environment

It is obvious that Snow College offers students a number of opportunities to become involved on campus. By taking advantage of these opportunities, these participants were able to learn leadership skills and increase their abilities in a variety of ways. Student government is just one of the many ways students can become involved. The participants said that as they became involved they learned that Snow College fostered an environment that taught them how to become a
leader. They shared with me that they learned leadership in a variety of ways and as a key to their learning was the guidance they were given by their advisors. As an example Kevin referred to the retreat the student leaders took to Mexico and explained how his advisors gave them room to learn and develop their leadership skills but were still available to direct them and offer suggestions. Talking about this particular Mexico retreat experience, Kevin recalled how they would interact with the residents at the care center during the day and in the evenings they would discuss their experiences with their advisors, Spencer and Julie:

Of course Julie and Spencer would incorporate the debriefing and we’d talk about each of the events and what we had done that day. Through these sessions of service and leadership development training with Spencer and Julie I learned that it wasn’t just about going in and playing checkers. We were serving in all different aspects. A real take away from the Mexico Trip for me was that we were not being served as student leaders… We were actually providing the service to our school and student body. That was the tone and expectation Spencer and Julie had for us. I’m not sure if they could have taught this to us in the classroom. But that was such a powerful experience to go and to experience that leadership is not always about being in the forefront. Being a student body officer wasn’t always about getting up in front of everyone at student activities, leading the crowd, but it was sometimes the quiet hard working, behind the scenes times that may not always get recognized that were important. That was a real grounding experience for me and set the tone for the year of service ahead (Kevin).

Kevin and the other participants expressed their feelings of appreciation for being able to learn in an environment like Snow College. As Sasha became involved in student government, she explained, “Coming in right away, I sensed that I was among a high caliber of pure leaders. I felt, I felt blessed to associate
with every single person that I worked with” (Sasha). Sasha recalled how she learned valuable lessons from her peers, her counselors, and her leaders. “They taught me something and I respected them and I felt tutored by them” (Sasha). Such experiences taught these young leaders how to take charge and run successful activities. She said “Watching them, learning from them, those kinds of things, I think caused me to mature that way. I learned not only from their example, but from their association” (Sasha). Sasha continued the conversation telling me that at Snow College she had learned that as a leader you are not someone who stands on a pedestal, instead the leader is the pedestal to build other students up. As she learned this and put it into practice she realized the profound impact she was having on others:

And that, to be more aware of the impact I was having on others instead of the impact I was having on events or activities or things like that, that we were responsible for I became much more aware of that difference that I was as a student leader. That I could impact people instead of programs (Sasha).

Casey spoke about a time his group was trying to bring more awareness on campus related to the student senate. The group thought the senate would benefit by having their own logo to create more identity for the group. They brainstormed ideas for a logo and as they presented their ideas to their advisors, the advisors were not nearly as excited about this idea as the student leaders:

I remember having the opportunity to form an argument and say we think this is a good idea for these reasons and be able to present it to them. And as we presented it to them they thought, you know, you’re right. You
make a great argument, a great presentation and we’re going to go with that. It’s not only as good experience to learn, but also to build confidence in drafting proposals (Casey).

Casey expressed how this was a great learning experience for him and he continues to use these skills even today as a banker. He said:

I work in banking and you often need your supervisor’s authority or approval perhaps to make a loan or to fund a business or various things. I use those skills every day to make my case for this business. And I definitely learned a lot of that in student government at Snow College, informally, being able to try to persuade (Casey).

Thus the students had found themselves in an environment that helped shape and refine their leadership skills and abilities at Snow College.

Professional Support

While continuing the conversation with the participants it became clear to me that Snow College offered several types of professional support. The third major theme is about how they were taught by the example of many mentors. Excellent mentors and their examples of leadership created an environment for learning at Snow College. Finally, these participants also expressed how they felt there was an expectation for them to learn leadership and then to put the concepts, principles, and skills into practice as student leaders.

Professional Mentors

The student government advisors at Snow College, Spencer and Julie, understood how powerful mentoring can be in a young adult’s life. In fact, the
participants recalled some powerful learning experiences that took place as they were student leaders. For example:

One thing I think that really helped to mold us in this new officer training was Spencer and Julie, I never remember them once telling us what to do. They were true examples of leadership because they brought out the best in each one of us. They would kind of nudge us in a certain direction or push us to ask the right question. They had this way of leading us into finding the right answer that they seemed to know from the very beginning. I appreciated the fact that they allowed this type of self-discovery to take place with each of us. It made us stronger leaders (Kevin).

As the participants were mentored by their advisors it allowed them the opportunity to think out of the box about themselves and leadership. Sasha said, “They really challenged us as student leaders to look beyond ourselves and critically think and create new ideas” (Sasha). All of the participants recalled the many hours their advisors spent mentoring and teaching them to become better individuals and leaders:

I can really say that I left Snow College a better person because of the two of them. It had a huge impact on me. It’s been more than 10 years ago now and to this day I don’t think I have experienced that type of a mentored relationship (Sasha).

As the students learned to become leaders, Spencer and Julie wanted them to learn to think for themselves and make informed decisions about policies and issues at the college. Kevin remembered times when Spencer would say to their group “This is the way it’s going to be… Then he would turn around and encourage us to ask ourselves does it have to be that way? Or can we challenge
what’s happening here?” (Kevin). Kevin went on to explain that as they were taught to do this they learned to explore the issues at hand and gain a better understanding, learning from their advisors that as they asked questions and became better informed they could clarify an idea or issue and make better decisions.

Brett had served as the Student Body President of Snow College. He recalled how during his year in office he developed a good relationship with his advisor, Spencer. Brett said they would often meet one-on-one together and talk about school issues, projects, and the mood of the other officers. “We would just talk about anything really” (Brett). This is the kind of mentoring that many of my participants recalled as we talked of the mentoring that took place while they were student leaders on the Snow College campus.

*Taught by Example*

Being taught by example was a powerful learning tool for the former student leaders. Sasha shared a lesson her advisors taught her about character. “Spencer and Steve (another administrator at Snow College) taught us a lesson about character; you could look at both of them and see that they demonstrated what they were teaching” (Sasha). As this advisor and college administrator continued to be an example of what they taught, Sasha found herself wanting to pattern her leadership traits after theirs, she continued, “They lived what they
taught and you wanted to be that type of leader”(Sasha). Teaching by example was a powerful tool for these student leaders.

Casey recalled that he had several opportunities to learn from the teachings and examples of these advisors and other college administrators. He also said that he cherished the few occasions that he had to observe and learn from the President of the College and others in similar positions throughout the State:

It was an extremely good opportunity to rub shoulders with these types of people like the President of the College. And then I had the opportunity to go to meetings on the state level with presidents of other colleges, other student body presidents… That was priceless to be able to see these gentlemen and see how they carried themselves. You can’t help but learn from that, want to carry yourself that way. And that was a specific area where I think I grew leaps and bounds (Casey).

Even a former student leader got into the act by setting a good example for these student leaders. He was the owner of the home and care center described in the Mexico experience. Mindi described him this way: “He shared a lot of his experiences of leadership at Snow College and we saw somebody who had been there, done that and walked in our shoes” (Casey). This alumnus gave back to the college in many exemplary ways such as providing his home for a retreat each year, opening up his care center for students to learn to give of themselves, and sharing his experiences as a former student leader.

The former student leaders shared many experiences of learning by the examples of those authority figures they looked up to. As the researcher, I
reflected on some of the words they used to describe their learning experiences such as “trust,” “share,” “teach,” “demonstrate,” and “self-discovery.” The Snow College administration understood the role of advisors and mentors in teaching good leadership to student government leaders. The President of Snow College also set a powerful example of what a good leader should be for these former student leaders to follow. The participants were greatly impacted by his example, so much so that we will explore this as the next sub-theme.

*The College President*

The study participants spoke of one opportunity in particular to meet informally with the College President. Specifically, Kevin and Mindi reflected on the powerful example this man set for them and the effect it had on their leadership development. Kevin shared an experience when the student council was invited to attend a barbecue at the President’s house. He said, “I remember we went to the President’s house, he always held a barbecue for all incoming student body officers and the outgoing student body officers… He was out there slinging hot dogs and hanging out with us” (Kevin). It impressed Kevin to see the President on a level he could relate to:

This provided us an opportunity to informally meet him as the leader of our school. This was a great opportunity I think for me to be able to be exposed to somebody that’s completely in charge of the college. Someone that I felt was a little untouchable and even unapproachable (Kevin).
Kevin then described a powerful example of a good leader that the President provided in a teaching moment:

As a leader he brought us to his home and brought himself to our level and talked to us in a very informal setting. I remember leaving that event with greater respect for him than I ever probably would have in a formal meeting…. This informal process was much more impactful to us as student leaders and taught me the meaning of building personal relationships of trust in informal, non-threatening environments. I left his home that day and I wanted to be a leader like him (Kevin).

The President was already respected as a leader by Kevin and then he opened his home in a very informal way to allow access to these student leaders. Kevin was very impressed by this gesture which built trust and respect as well as provided an excellent example of good leadership. Mindi also remembers attending this same annual event. She said, “And I remember just the way he hosted us and had us there” (Mindi). This made a strong impression on her as a young student leader. She continued, “He was so good to be on our level and just those few minutes of him talking to us, he wasn’t the President of our College, he was a friend” (Mindi). As the President shared his personal time and opened his home to these student leaders, they had a desire to emulate his leadership style:

He just knew how to speak to people, how to make people feel comfortable. And I remember sitting back thinking, when I’m his age; I hope people feel that way around me. And I hope I can teach people the way he does (Mindi).

Angie was also impressed by the open and friendly leadership style of the President and his wife. Angie said, “To this day he is one of my favorite people,
he is just incredible. And his wife literally just adopted all of us as student leaders” (Angie). Angie’s experience included the annual barbecue, as well as an ongoing relationship with the President and his wife that existed throughout her tenure as a student leader:

And you know, we got to go to their house and have so many personal conversations with them. Because they really wanted to understand what the student experience was like for students. So they’d pick our brains all the time. And it was so surreal to me to have that kind of access and relationship with a college president (Angie).

The students spoke often of how open, trusting and supportive their advisors were to them, it is obvious the advisors emulated the same thing they saw the President do with the student leaders. This culture of setting an example as leaders contributed to the leadership development that took place in the lives of the participants.

The institution helped raised the bar for these former student leaders not only by the example they set as leaders, but also in the high expectations placed upon them during their tenure in office.

*High Expectations to Learn and Do*

As the participants continued to learn through their experiences in student government, they also understood that they were expected to put into practice the leadership lessons that they were learning. Each student leader was engaged in learning informally through such things as student council-sponsored campus activities, conferences, and retreats. They were also engaged in formal learning in
the classroom. Angie recalled how her advisors taught her and the other council members leadership principles and then encouraged them to practice what they had learned. She said, “You were also expected to do all of that outside of the classroom” (Angie). Angie remembered how they were taught to give back to the students on campus. They were elected into a student government position and were taught by their advisors to serve the student community. “You’re expected to contribute to the betterment of this community that we have” (Angie). They were taught to join clubs and go to activities and connect to the other students on campus. Other participants also shared many experiences about how the advisors at Snow College expected the student leaders to step up to a new level of leadership. Sasha shared this:

So one thing I noticed right away is that I felt like I had graduated to the college level of leadership …And so I felt like it was, the bar had been raised or something, which excited me. It made me want to work harder. It made me more respectful of my peers. I felt like I could learn things from them. And so that was good I learned more about what leadership means (Sasha).

During the group interview they shared experiences of how they were challenged in their student leadership positions. Often the challenges came as they tried to apply the leadership principles they were learning. Many of the participants had been involved in various leadership positions before entering Snow College; however they proclaimed that what they had learned about leadership at Snow was more demanding and difficult. “Prior to coming to Snow
college and being involved in leadership, I don’t think I’d ever handled the workload anywhere near being a full-time student and also being involved in student government” (Mary). She explained increased workload more fully:

You know, you have a lot of irons in the fire, a lot of social things going on, a lot of academic things going on. And you soon learned that student government was a full time job in and of itself. So to me, that’s an incredibly valuable experience to learn how to manage yourself and your time. And that’s an experience that not a lot of people have (Mary).

The Snow College advisors knew these young adult student leaders were ready to learn new principles and were very capable of stepping into the challenge of being a leader on campus. Angie explained how she learned about budgets and then was expected to manage the budget responsibly. She recalled how she had never had the experience of managing a large budget before:

You’ve never had to manage a budget that’s $300,000 or whatever. I mean that’s so much money when you’re 18 years old and you’re like you want me to manage all of this? And I get to say who gets to spend what? I mean it was such a surreal transition, but I honestly, I’m trying to think, but I feel like I had the most golden life possible at Snow College (Angie).

Kevin recalled that ‘doing’ was often at times hard work, with very little recognition:

Being a student body officer wasn’t always about getting up in front of everyone at student activities, leading the crowd, but it was sometimes the quiet hard working, behind the scenes times that may not always get recognized that were important (Kevin).

All the participants recalled the expectations for learning and doing at Snow College. They were expected to do a number of things that were meant to help
them learn and grow. Mindi explained it as “Coming out of my comfort zone” (Mindi). The advisors and Institution provided an environment rich with learning experiences which gave the students an opportunity to apply what they were learning to their role in student government. This took place in both informal and formal settings. The next and final theme concentrates on what took place formally in the classroom at Snow College.

*Education*

The last major theme of education is important to illustrate the learning opportunities provided for the students on campus. When reviewing various interview segments from the data provided by the participants, I recognized two sub-themes that emerged as a dominate factor in the participants’ learning experiences at Snow College. The first was the leadership class they were expected to participate in and the second was the culture of learning that was abundant at Snow. The leadership class was held fall and winter semesters and addressed different leadership topics each semester (see appendix C).

*The Leadership Class*

Student leaders benefit from the traditional learning environment in many ways. As the former student leaders attended their required leadership class, it appeared that Julie worked hard at instructing them and providing an environment rich with leadership principles. Kevin echoed his positive sentiments about the leadership class and concept on teamwork that stuck with him. He said, “What
Snow College provided for us has helped us to become mature leaders today” (Kevin). He explained further that as he has tried, from time to time, to share his student leader experiences with other people. “It is difficult at best to do so. I don’t even think I’ve done it justice” (Kevin). The things the student leaders learned continue to help them in their current lives. Kevin continued to explain that as he left Snow and continued on the path of higher education, completing undergraduate and graduate degrees, the concept of teamwork stuck with him. “This concept has stuck with me. It really changed me…the process of teams and how teams work. …Julie helped us see deeper in those classes and wanted us to develop an understanding of leadership at an early age” (Kevin).

Thinking back on her experience, Angie reflected, “I can’t believe that every institution doesn’t do this.” Angie explained that as they participated and learned in their leadership class they were taught to broaden their minds and question what leadership really was:

We learned about the importance of following as well as leading. You’d go just get rejuvenated in this class. And she’d [Julie] give you wonderful handouts and worksheets to do and she’d have you write one-page responses back to her so she could keep a tab on how you’re doing and what your thoughts were on this and if you found something interesting or wanted to further discuss it, she’d call you up and invite you into her office. And it was so cool. You know, and I just feel like, I learned so much about leadership just through that class (Angie).

Mary explained it this way, “I enjoyed the class so much. And the reason I enjoyed it was because it was just fun” (Mary). Mary pointed out that, as student...
leaders, they were busy and stressed out, taking college classes and being involved with student government. She said that as they supported each other and were engaged in the leadership class, the learning experience became enjoyable. She continued, “But when we got to class, we knew we were going to learn how to be better leaders…and we learned a lot because we had fun learning” (Mary). The class environment was engaging and this helped her and the others learn how to be better leaders.

*An Established Environment for Active Learning*

Snow College provided its student leaders a number of experiences that helped them learn and grow as future leaders. Each participant experienced learning in different ways even though all concluded that Snow College was a rich environment for learning. Snow College as a community college was unique in a couple of ways; most of the students lived on or near campus and the Institution hired two professional advisors that focused primarily on student leadership development. These two aspects added to the rich learning environment for the students involved. Angie felt an expectation to immerse herself in her education as well as contribute in the classroom. She described her educational experience this way:

I understood what education was about at Snow College. I understood why people are encouraged to go to college. I understood why people were encouraged not only to pursue a degree, but to get an education… You were expected to participate in class and get to know your professors and go to study groups and contribute (Angie).
This environment was created in a variety of ways through classroom instruction as well as by their advisors’ examples. As the participants took advantage of the great opportunities for learning provided at Snow College, their college experiences were greatly enhanced. Mindi shared an insight that demonstrated Julie’s commitment to creating an active learning environment. She said, “I remember just listening, her approach was so good and just wanting to be a better person, wanting to give more to the people around me and be the best that I could be” (Mindi). Mindi was inspired to be a better person because of the learning environment that surrounded her. She went on to share another experience that she learned from:

We learn more from getting out of our comfort zones and doing something that’s really uncomfortable. And once you get your feet wet and you get involved in that activity or whatever you’re project that you are doing and start realizing that’s where I need to be, because I’m learning from the experience (Mindi).

Kevin felt like his awareness of the learning environment was heightened on a daily basis because of the process of debriefing they experienced on a regular basis:

You could not debrief at the end of the day if you didn’t pay attention, if you weren’t actively involved. If you weren’t engaged in what the group was doing, you had nothing to say. And then going back through and debriefing allowed you to really learn (Kevin).

His experience caused him to stay engaged in what they as a group were doing, and ultimately he felt like he was learning.
Summary

In an effort to bring closure to the research questions and subsequent stories and experiences that were shared, I moved forward with a summary and discussion of the major themes with their respective sub-themes. The process of developing themes and sub-themes helped bring organization and structure to the volume of stories and examples shared by the study participants.
CHAPTER SIX

OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTION

Leadership development involves engaging with learning opportunities in one’s environment over time to build one’s capacity or efficacy to engage in leadership (Komives et al., 2006, p. 402)

Chapter six presents my final observations and reflections from the analysis of this study. I completed this study using a qualitative approach in a field that traditionally has been studied through various quantitative research methods (Miller, 2003; Murphy & Riggio, 2003). This phenomenological approach was used to capture the stories and experiences of the research participants (Merriam, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Manen, 1998). Two questions guided this study: 1) While you were a student leader at Snow College, how did your leadership skills and abilities develop? 2) While you were a student at Snow College, how did the institution specifically contribute to your growth and development as a student leader? As the former student leaders in this study shared their stories, I hope you gained a rich description into their leadership development experience. I know that the participants’ description of how they learned leadership while they served as a student leaders added depth and understanding to my own knowledge of student leadership development found at a community college.

The outline of this chapter will be as follows: 1) Observations made from the themes that evolved from the participants lived experiences. 2) Consideration
for reflection and practice by the practitioners in the field of student leadership
development. 3) Possible continued research in the field of student leadership
development. 4) Personal reflection on this study.

Observation One: An Elected Position within Student Government was the Catalyst for Leadership Development

The eight participants studied were all members of student government at Snow College. Student government was designed to give students a recognized voice, provide student life, and provide leadership development opportunities at the College. The structure of student government was set up to use the election process as the selection method to participate in the major leadership roles. Committee members and lesser leadership roles gained access and participation by an application and appointment process.

The participants in this study described the many responsibilities they had such as balancing budgets, taking care of student issues, and providing student life activities on campus. These student leaders felt accountable not only to themselves, but to colleagues, the student newspaper, advisors, administration, faculty, and fellow students. This accountability heightened their commitment to learn and perform their duties well (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Posner, 2009). They felt pressure to perform or to accept the possible consequences. Some of them learned this in extreme situations, such as the case of the Snow College Student Body President who had been impeached. The former student leaders in
this study who were responsible for impeaching him felt isolated, stressed, and misunderstood by those who were not involved. This is merely one example out of many which illustrate insights into how their role in student government provided real life experiences about how the actions one takes as a student leader have consequences (Miller, 2003).

These former student leaders also shared many other examples and stories about opportunities and experiences they had as they served in their student government. The opportunities they described provided them hands-on leadership experiences and the feeling of being valued and empowered (Posner, 2009). The positions they held taught them how to use their influence to make a positive difference in the lives of other students. Every experience they described varied from the next one but ultimately they learned important leadership skills and abilities from their experiences (Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Komives et al., 2006; Posner, 2009).

In summary, the participants shared how they acquired leadership skills and abilities while serving in student government (Miller, 2003; Posner, 2009). In fact, all of the participants have since used these skills in their various careers, church assignments, and communities.

*Observation Two: There was an Institutional Culture at Snow College that Supported Student Leadership Development*

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of culture as a concept is that it points us to phenomena that are below the surface, that are powerful in their
impact but invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious. In that sense, culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual. We can see the behavior that results, but often we cannot see the forces underneath that cause certain kinds of behavior. Yet, just as our personality and character guide and constrain our behavior, so does culture guide and constrain the behavior of members of a group through the shared norms that are held in that group (Schein, 2004, p. 8).

One important finding in this study was that Snow College fostered a culture that supported student leadership development. The participants all described how they had experienced a change or a feeling of growth in leadership skills and abilities at Snow College. They further explained how this change or growth took place. Analysis of the participants’ experiences revealed that Snow College demonstrated that student leadership development was an important focus.

Snow College student government provided the participants with many real life leadership experiences. Student leadership development was, by institutional design, incorporated into classroom instruction as well as through practical hands-on application by participation in student government (Kuh, 2003; Posner, 2004). The former student leaders had many constructive and educational experiences such as daily interaction with their advisors as well as opportunities to make a difference in the lives of their fellow students (Komives et al., 2006).

The culture on Snow College campus also provided a setting that allowed student leaders to explore leadership in a framework that placed responsibility directly on the participants and allowed them to experience both success and
failure (Posner, 2009). Two professional advisors provided advice and support to the student leaders throughout their experiences. They used continual debriefing as a learning process, which encouraged personal assessment and understanding among the student leaders (Posner, 2009).

The organized culture was created as the result of a number of variables that existed within the institution. The data gathered indicates that Snow College had indeed created a culture of student leadership development. I came to this conclusion from the stories and experiences shared by the participants in this study. For example, after completing their education at Snow, these students began their careers or pursued advanced degrees. Nevertheless, they all shared similar stories and examples of how Snow College influenced their lives and their leadership development. Even though in some cases a decade had passed, all of the participants shared similar experiences and examples that demonstrate a sustained feeling that Snow College considered student leadership development to be important. If you didn’t already know that the participants had been involved in student government at different periods of time you would likely conclude that they were all friends and colleagues who had shared the same experiences at the same time. The administration, advisors, and staff of Snow College all shared a consistent vision of student leadership development which was entrenched in the values of the college itself.
Throughout this process I kept asking myself, “How was this culture created and developed by Snow College?” Was it the collective thinking of several college professionals or was it a more fluid evolution with one experience leading to another and formalizing over time? Unfortunately there is no way to tell given the scope of this study. But regardless of its origins, it is evident that these participants felt that leadership development was thriving at Snow College. They felt that they had learned how to become leaders through an environment at Snow College that was leadership development driven.

In 2001, a study conducted by Cress et al. which leadership development was examined, stated “If institutions are serious about developing lifelong competencies in their students and if they desire to graduate a legacy of leaders in business, organizations, governments and schools then leadership development and programs and activities must be given priority” (Cress et al., 2001, p. 23).

To give more validity to this study and the existence of a student leadership development culture, the study criteria included the selection of former student leaders with a period of time distancing them from their tenure in student government at Snow College (Fincher, 2009; Murphy & Riggio, 2003). Thus they were alumni who had spent time pursuing advanced degrees or careers. I believe as the researcher that given the passage of time, the participants would have pondered, reflected, and perhaps assimilated the experiences they had while they were student leaders at the college, especially those experiences relating to
leadership skills and abilities. The participants in this study were involved in student government at the College, in some cases ten years apart from each other, and yet they shared many similar experiences with the same type of leadership development outcomes.

In summary, from the data provided by the former student leaders, I found strong evidence that a culture of student leadership development did exist over an extended period of time at Snow College.

*Observation Three: Professional and Engaged Advisors played an Intentional Key Role in Student Leadership Development*

The challenge of modeling leadership must begin with leadership educators in their classroom or teaching context, in how they administer their organization, and in their personal interactions. Modeling the way is the truest form of translating theory into practice: “Walking the talk” (Middlebrooks & Allen, 2009, p. viii).

The study participants and their stories provided insight into how they learned leadership from the extraordinary examples of their two professional advisors. The participants described their advisors by using various terms such as “friend,” “leader,” and “professional.” Their descriptions all point to the word “mentor,” which the participants used several times to describe their advisors. Mentor is defined by the Encarta Dictionary as:

An experienced advisor and supporter is somebody, usually older and more experienced, who advises and guides a younger, less experienced person or a trainer who is a senior or experienced person in a company or organization who gives guidance and training to a junior colleague. (Mentor, 2009)
The definition has provided a good description of the student leader’s experience in student government. Each participant shared experiences and stories that support this description. There is data that demonstrates a relationship of trust and respect existed between the participants and the advisors. This relationship helped create the opportunity for open and honest communication which led to an advisors’ teaching moment that was powerful and shaping in nature (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives et al., 2006). The advisors provided the student leaders opportunities to practice leadership as they encountered problems and explored possible solutions. These former student leaders were allowed to experience the full extent of responsibility within their positions. They provided stories and examples which established an understanding into how the student leader and advisor relationship helped shape their leadership skills and abilities. The example the advisors set was firmly established in the participants’ memories. As they spoke individually and as a group, the participants would reminisce about their advisors and speak of them with the highest respect and enthusiasm when they shared their stories and experiences about the important role the advisors played in their lives and student leadership responsibilities (Middlebrooks & Allen, 2009). Susan Komives and her colleagues, in a study on the elements of student leadership development, spoke of the key role of advisors and mentors. They said, “Students need advisors and mentors to provide a safe place for them to reflect and make meaning of their experiences as they make this significant journey”
The advisors at Snow College did indeed provide this type of environment spoken of by Komives. The student leaders valued the learning opportunities from their advisors as well as from others at the college who provided some of the same mentoring as the advisors did. The participants identified the College President, some administrators and other staff members who influenced them. There were several examples of how these individuals willingly gave of their time and expertise to assist and help them with various projects and issues.

In summary, the relationship and exchange that took place between the advisors and the student leaders made a significant difference in their development (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives et al., 2006). The relationship was one of respect, trust, and confidence. The students chose to be involved, and after acceptance of their responsibilities they were given positions of trust in student government. This created a need to seek help, guidance, and direction from those with experience and authority. This help came through informal and formal leadership education by the advisors and others of influence especially the administration. The student leaders were encouraged to lead and in many cases they were expected to do more, try harder, and excel in their duties. This level of involvement resulted in significant learning experiences that shaped numerous aspects of their lives, including their leadership skills and abilities (Cress et al., 2001; Fincher, 2009; Posner, 2009).
Observation Four: The Structured Formal Learning Forums within Student Government are Important to Leadership Development

Formal structured learning at Snow is composed of classes, conferences, workshops, and leadership retreats. The study participants were required to enroll in the leadership class taught by one of the professional advisors. This formal setting was designed to teach leadership principles and skills. Each of the participants spoke of the classroom setting, the concepts they learned, and how they had opportunities to put the concepts directly to work within their roles in student government (Coers, Lorensen, & Anderson, 2009; Fincher, 2009; Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Komives et al., 2006; Posner, 2009).

The advisors were in a unique position to observe the student leaders in action and then adapt their lesson plans to help them with relevant leadership concepts. The participants shared examples of how the lessons taught were often timely and provided leadership insights and skills to use within their positions as student leaders.

In summary, the participants believed they benefited from the formal learning environment by helping them to shape their leadership skills and abilities as they fulfilled their student government responsibilities.
Observation Five: The Informal, yet Structured, Hands-On Experiences Provided Teaching Moments that Made a Lasting Impression on these Participants

Like the formal leadership education, the participants also spoke about the informal education that took place as part of their student leadership experiences. Many times this informal learning took place at the same time as the formal learning process (Coers et al., 2009). They spoke of many opportunities to experience hands-on practical applications of what they learned as they learned it (Coers et al., 2009; Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Komives et al., 2006; Posner, 2009). These hands-on experiences were structured many times by the advisors to teach a specific leadership principle (Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999). The participants discussed these structured informal teaching/learning moments with the same high regard as they did for the formal classroom experience (Posner, 2004). One particular example shared by all of the participants was an informal experience orchestrated by their advisors and was referred to as “Mexico.” The resulting leadership principle of service to others was spoken of by every participant as the major outcome of this particular experience. This hands-on experience was well thought-out (Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999) and helped the participants learn that titles and positions really did not have much meaning, but rather it was the service or support they provided to others that was important (Cress et al., 2001). Des Marais, Yang and Farzanehkia’s (2000) believe that learning leadership skills through service builds on what young
people already know and can do well while challenging them to enhance their
skills or even try something different. They also believe that through service-
learning, young people become engaged leaders taking responsibility for solving
complex problems.

In summary, for some of the study participants it had been a decade or
more since they had participated in these informal hands-on experiences and yet
they spoke about it as if it had happened yesterday. The leadership concepts were
well-received and never forgotten. This research demonstrates that there is a
powerful relationship between hands-on, informal experiences and the
development of leadership skills and abilities (Astin & Astin, 2000; Burkhardt &
Zimmerman-Oster, 1999; Cress et al., 2001; Coers et al., 2009; Freeman &

*Observation Six: Unstructured yet Urgent Situational Leadership Decisions
Connected to the Positions held within Student Government created Real Life
Opportunities to Learn Leadership Skills*

These study participants held positions of responsibility within student
government. There were a number of teaching/learning moments that were
unstructured and just a natural result of the actions they took as student leaders.
The Institution held them accountable for their actions and also gave them latitude
to make decisions, solve problems and to work as a team. This provided ample
opportunities to have hands-on experiences that helped further shape their
leadership skills and abilities (Murphy & Riggio, 2003). Each of the participants
shared real and sometimes emotional stories and experiences that validate the researcher’s observation.

Implications for Practice and Further Research

Leadership development involves engaging with learning opportunities in one’s environment over time to build one’s capacity or efficacy to engage in leadership (Komives et al., 2006, p. 402)

Considerations for Reflection and Practice

The research gathered from this study as mentioned spanned a decade of time and yet the same stories, examples and experiences kept surfacing in the interviews. The insights and experiences shared by the participants ultimately developed into themes and sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes actually shape my recommendations for consideration by those student leadership practitioners or administrators interested in the student leadership development process in their respective community colleges. These recommendations are not intended to be a comprehensive list for practitioners or administrators interested in student leadership development. Nevertheless they provide key elements or aspects that were apparent from the research completed at Snow College. They did have a successful program as demonstrated by the stories, examples and experiences of the study participants. Brett had this parting comment about the student leadership development program at Snow College, “I would say that it’s totally changed how I look at leadership…” (Brett). Mindi gave this conclusive thought about her experience at Snow College, “And all the things that I do now, I
feel like Snow was such a foundation…” (Mindi). Tracy said this of his opportunity to learn leadership at Snow College, “But I feel like it elevated my life a hundredfold” (Tracy).

Taking into consideration the following aspects of a comprehensive community college such as personalities, physical and social environments, resource availability, student interest and other institutional conditions that may exist, I propose the following recommendations for consideration by leadership development practitioners and administrators:

1. **Student government or some other significant student life program that will provide heightened leadership opportunities and that will allow a student leader to practice or have hands-on leadership experiences.** In the case of Snow College, student government had nearly a 100 year history at the institution. This organization and recognized department gave the student leaders many opportunities to practice leadership as part of their responsibilities. They felt needed and loyal to the organization as they experienced the weight of responsibility on their shoulders. This provided for leadership development education to take place not only in the classroom but in the laboratory of leadership responsibility within student government.

2. **The institution should have a culture that values the importance of student leadership development at all levels and lends support by creating opportunities for others including administration to mentor student leaders.**
This culture should also help promote responsibility and accountability to
heighten the student leaders need to learn and practice leadership skills
learned in formal leadership training forums. It was evident from this study
that Snow College created and supported a culture of student leadership
development.

3. The institution’s primary goal should be to educate and this goal needs to be
carried over to the leadership development program. Formal leadership
forums need to be developed to create an environment for leadership skills
and principles to be taught to student leaders. This should include a leadership
class and other teaching forums such as leadership conferences and retreats.
The central focus of the forums should be on teaching leadership principles
and skills that are outcome based yet applicable to their daily responsibilities
and challenges that arise from their sense of duty. Snow College created and
supported a leadership education forum by the development of the leadership
class, conferences, and retreats where leadership theory and skills were taught.

4. The institution should hire professional full-time advisors for their student life
organizations such as student government or whatever organization is part of
the student leadership development program. These advisors can be faculty
also but must have primary responsibility for daily interaction with these
student leaders. These individuals should be proactive, engaged and thriving
in their role as advisors. At Snow College they were full time advisors and
adjunct teachers in the formal classroom setting. This gave them a distinct advantage because of the opportunity to create teaching opportunities in formal and informal settings within the program. They should be considered architects in the design and application of the student leadership development program as they interact, mentor and teach student leaders. They play a powerful role and have the most influence on the students because of the relationship of trust that is built between them and the student leaders as evidenced in this study. In Snow College’s program the two advisors were engaged, well-versed, and grounded in leadership development theory and practice. Institutions serious about strong student leadership development programs should consider how well-trained and well-versed their faculty and student affairs professionals are in this field. Steps should be taken to train, teach and prepare individuals who will have mentoring and advising roles in student leadership development programs. The topic of this study focused on student leadership development and thus I did not address this important topic. However because of my interest in the role of the professional advisor I looked for and found volumes of literature on leadership development training for professionals within academic and student affairs.

5. There should be informal orchestrated experiences that help shape leadership skills and abilities in student leaders. This goes hand in hand with the formal forum learning experiences because it is an extension of the classroom
providing for practical application of theory and concept. The professional advisors/teachers are key to the success of these informal experiences because the experiences require thought and planning as well as post experience debriefing in order to make the intended outcome most successful. The study participants shared a great example of a successful informal orchestrated experience known as the “Mexico” trip.

6. The student leaders should be allowed hands-on experiences that are real and impactful such as those experienced by the study participants in student government at Snow College. These experiences are unintended and unplanned but are the result of fulfilling their student leader responsibilities. These experiences provide opportunities for success and failure as leadership skills are practiced in real life settings. These can be painful or positive for the student leader but yet again reinforce learned skills. The professional advisors or teacher can be a resource for student leaders to debrief what worked or didn’t work in these experiences. Leadership skills and abilities can be reinforced by the advisors even at this level of experiential learning.

Finally, this study validated what was intuitive for me as I directed a student leadership development program as spoken of earlier. I saw the same type of leadership development change come upon many of the students that I worked with on a daily basis. This study has allowed me to approach this leadership development process from a researcher standpoint and identify how leadership
development took place in those students deeply involved in a leadership development program at Snow College. The study identified themes and sub-themes that ultimately led to the creation the 6 recommendations just spoken of above.

_Potential Topics for Future Research_

The findings of the research were quite satisfying to me as the themes and sub-themes unfolded but it is apparent additional qualitative research is needed to provide greater insight and understanding into the student leadership development process. It is also apparent from the rich data provided by these study participants that that several additional aspects of the student leadership development process at Snow College need further research. This section focuses on the limitations of the study by suggesting possible additional research on student leadership development at Snow College:

1. A future study may look at the culture described by the students in this study and see if it was unique to this particular administration and set of advisors. Did the culture change after this President, administration and advisors were no longer involved at Snow College?

2. Student government as an organization played an important role in these former students’ experiences and how they learned leadership. What was the experience like at Snow College for student leaders who were appointed versus elected in student government? Or those who were in
other student organizations such as clubs, organizations or athletics? Did they experience the same leadership development as the participants in this study or was this unique to student government and these participants?

3. This study may be repeated though I would include students who were not involved in any leadership positions prior to coming to Snow College. Would they have had the same leadership development outcome? Or were the students in this study unique in that they came seeking to pursue leadership based on previous leadership experience? Or were these students ready to learn leadership when they came to the College? Or were they inspired when they became involved in the culture of leadership development at Snow College? Or perhaps the study could be better evaluated by looking at two groups simultaneously, one group of students who participated in student leadership and another group of students who had not participated in student leadership. The study could attempt to measure both groups’ leadership abilities and how they were or were not developed.

4. The former advisors helped in the selection of the study participants by identifying possible candidates. They readily provided a lengthy list of former student leaders who might be considered. The selection process was more deductive in nature. A future study may be repeated selecting former student leaders by a statistical model or a computer generated
random list. This might challenge or validate the results of this study by checking for bias in the selection process.

5. The former advisors played a key role in the student development process of these study participants. They were model professionals who advised and taught these student leaders diligently. This study focused on the former students’ perspective of the advisors role and effectiveness. This study did not give voice to the advisors in an attempt to understand the student leadership development process from their perspective. A future study should focus on the lived experience and insights of these former advisors. This would give the reader additional perspective how this successful program was created and sustained over the decade that these study participants were involved.

6. One of the criteria for selection of participants was they were alumni student leaders. The goal of this particular criterion was to allow time away from their experience at Snow College as an opportunity to gain perspective with all other of life’s experiences. Given the time away, the participants continued to share stories and experiences of how they learned leadership at Snow College. The stories were consistent which gave validity to the observations and recommendations of the study. However consideration should be given to the fact that this criterion may also be a limitation to the study in that in some cases the lengthy time away may
have distorted the real experience and thus inaccurate stories could have been shared. Another study may select students that were involved fairly recently so as to hear their stories that were more current and possibly more factual in nature. The stories, experiences and observations could be compared with this study to increase validity of the data.

7. The participants shared many stories and examples that demonstrated how they learned leadership at Snow College. As participants they were in a good position to identify and make recommendations for improvements to the leadership development program that existed at Snow College at the time of their tenure in student government. A limitation to this study was the participants were not asked what recommendations they would have had that would improve the program as it was. A future study would seek to include the participants’ recommendations into the data analysis and conclusions of the study. This would possibly provide insights that may be valuable for other colleagues to consider as they read the study.

In summary, this research project gave voice to 8 former student leaders within student government. They all participated in the leadership development program that was part of student government. The research was very limited in its focus but has captured the participants experiences and told their story. Through the items mentioned above, I attempted to expose the limitations of this study by making recommendations for possible further research at Snow College.
Personal Reflections

I chose the phenomenological approach because it focused on giving voice to the study participants and their personal lived experiences (Merriam, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Manen, 1998). From the rich description each shared with me during the research process, I gained valuable insights (Neuman, 2003) into their most memorable leadership experiences at Snow College. I was able to draw some definite conclusions after a deliberate and lengthy analysis of the data they provided.

The former student leaders involved in this study did in fact learn leadership and did demonstrate how that leadership development took place while they were student leaders in student government at Snow College. All of these participants identified Snow College as a place where their personal leadership skills and abilities greatly improved. The reader should keep in mind these individuals came to Snow College with differing degrees of leadership experiences, skills and abilities; however they each shared how they felt their leadership abilities and skills grew while participating as a student leader at the College. All of the study participants had spent time away from Snow College which gave them ample opportunity to reflect upon their experiences. They all easily identified leadership skills and abilities (Kouzes & Posner, 2005) they were currently using and trace those foundation or enhancement skills back to experiences they had as student leaders at Snow College. Mindi shared the
following about how she has applied what she learned at Snow College into her personal life, she said:

I go through life and I have built on so much from that experience. But sometimes you get off course and there have been those moments when I hear her (Julie) voice or I think back to those experiences or I see something from my (student government) book. I just remember the person I was at Snow and I want to keep that. And granted, hopefully I’ve matured more and learned more over the years, but I want to keep that person that I was because I still feel that way today. I feel like I was the best person I ever had been at that point through that experience (Mindi).

Finally from a larger perspective, student leadership development did take place on a community college campus in Ephraim Utah. Snow College as a community college has a long history of student leader involvement that dates back to the early 1900s.

I have deeply appreciated the valuable stories and insights these eight participants shared with me. They willingly participated in the study and made time in their busy schedules to meet with me so I could conduct these interviews. Several gave a second effort by attending the group interview. My hope is that I have correctly heard and reflected their feelings as they would expect from a researcher. My additional hope is that perhaps this study will contribute to the scholarly discussion that should continue around this important topic.

I am indebted to the former Dean and Director over student government at Snow College for their time and efforts to provide me with a lengthy list of former student leaders from which these eight participants emerged. I appreciate
the current administration at Snow College for giving me permission to access
their alumni student leaders as well as the two former professionals who were part
of the student leadership development phenomena.
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APPENDIX A
An Example of a New and Developing Student Leadership Development Program

The Center for the Advancement of Leadership at Utah Valley University

While most colleges and universities around the nation focus on traditional approaches to teaching, few provide the life, leadership and character building skills offered at Utah Valley University. Recognizing that most students are often hired for their perceived technical abilities, yet fired for their lack of personal and interpersonal skill sets, Utah Valley University offers students the opportunity to augment their academic experience with coursework, skill/competency development, and leadership experiences that give the personal and interpersonal skills needed for the 21st century. Whether you are studying business, law, engineering, culinary arts, or automotive mechanics, The Center for the Advancement of Leadership will give you the tools necessary not only to compete, but also excel in your areas of focus.

The Center for the Advancement of Leadership offers four leadership certification options to augment each student's professional and personal development skills. Each certificate level offers a unique combination of academic coursework, skills and competency development, and experiential education customized for each student's personal needs.

Leadership Certification:

This level is the most basic certification offered by The Center for the Advancement of Leadership. It requires that each student participate in three core classes, including Mgmt 1250, Principles of Leadership; Mgmt 2450, Principles of Personal Excellence; and Mgmt 3010, Principles of Management.

During the completion of one’s academic core, each student wishing to obtain this level of certification must participate in a minimum of 15 seminar hours of additional training. While the focus of these 15 hours is intended for specific skill and competency development, students may complete these hours in a variety of ways. These include:

- Attending numerous Presidential Luncheon sessions offered by the CAL
- Attending the MasterMind series offered by the CAL
• Attending the Executive Lecture Series offered by the School of Business
• Attending any number of workshops/seminars offered by the CAL
• Any external workshop or skill-based program that meets the student’s needs

Within each of the certification offerings the training hours are intended to serve the specific skill/competency needs of each student, based upon the feedback they received in their initial 360-degree assessment. With this in mind, each student should work closely with his or her personal coach/mentor to choose a path that is best suited to his or her leadership development needs.

In addition to these two phases of developmental activity, each participant at this certification level is required to pursue a total of 30 hours of leadership experience. Like the options above, these hours can be fulfilled by participating in any number of leadership capacities on or off campus. These might include:

• Student Government
• UV Clubs
• UV Leaders
• Service Learning
• Student Alumni Association
• Or many other leadership experience projects that are approved by the CAL

Note: There are any number of leadership opportunities on or off campus. It is expected that each student participates in either a direct or indirect leadership position when serving in these capacities.

The final requirement of the basic certification includes the interview and report of a prominent leader in the student’s chosen field. A three-page paper describing the lessons learned from this individual accompanies the interview. This, in combination with all other projects, including a completed journal detailing each student’s leadership experience (at least 1-page per month), will be part of a final portfolio review. After completing all of the requirements, the student will receive his/her Leadership certification.

Leadership Certification with Distinction:

This is the next level of certification offered by The Center for the Advancement of Leadership. Similar to the Leadership certification, the Leadership certification with Distinction requires that each student participate in three core classes,
including Mgmt 1250, Principles of Leadership; Mgmt 2450, Principles of Personal Excellence; and Mgmt 3500, Leadership Process. In addition to this core, students are required to take one elective academic course from a CAL approved list.

During the completion of one’s academic core, each student wishing to obtain the Leadership certification With Distinction must participate in a minimum of 30 hours of additional training. While the focus of these 30 hours is intended for specific skill and competency development, students may complete these hours in a variety of ways as described above.

The training hours within each certification level are intended to serve the specific skill/competency needs of each student, based upon the feedback they received in their initial 360 assessment. With this in mind, each student should work closely with his or her personal coach to choose a path that meets his or her leadership development needs.

In addition to these two phases, each participant is required to pursue a total of 45 hours of leadership experience as described in the first level Leadership certification.

The final requirement of the Leadership certification With Distinction includes the interview and report of three prominent leaders in one’s chosen field. A five-page paper describing the lessons learned from these individuals follows this. This and all other completed projects will be part of one’s final portfolio review, completing the requirements for this level.

**Leadership Certification with High Distinction:**

This is the highest certification offered by The Center for the Advancement of Leadership. Similar to the other certifications, the certification with high distinction requires that each student participate in four core classes, including Mgmt 1250, Principles of Leadership; Mgmt 2450, Principles of Personal Excellence; Psych. 2400, Positive Psychology; and Mgmt 3500, Leadership Process. In addition to this core, students are required to take one elective course from a CAL approved list.

During the completion of one’s academic core, each student wishing to obtain the Leadership certification with High Distinction must participate in a minimum of 45 hours of additional training as described in the other certification levels. In
addition to these two phases of developmental activity, each participant is required to pursue a total of 60 hours of leadership experience as described above.

The final requirement of the executive level certification includes the interview and report of five prominent leaders in one’s chosen field. A seven-page paper describing the lessons learned from these individuals follows this. This as well as all other projects completed will be part of one’s final portfolio review. This completes the requirement of the Leadership certification With High Distinction.

10 STEPS TO LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATION

Step 1 Application Process
Complete and submit your application to The Center for the Advancement of Leadership (CAL). The application can be found online at www.uvu.edu/leadership or in the CAL office, WB 236.

Step 2 360 Evaluation
Participate in a self- and peer assessment process (360). Note: other assessments, such as the Meyers Briggs, Strong Interest, and others are available upon request.

Step 3 Leadership Journal
Keep a journal of your personal leadership journey, development, and reflections.

Step 4 Mentor Meetings
Meet with your mentor and student mentor monthly. Document your experiences in your portfolio.
► Freshmen and Sophomores (Life Coach)
► Juniors and Seniors (Discipline Specific Mentors)

Step 5 Coursework in Leadership
Take and complete the leadership courses and maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA. No leadership course grade may be lower than a C-. Keep a copy of your unofficial transcript in your portfolio.
► Certificate of Leadership with High Distinction (4 core courses/1 elective) (15 credits)
► Certificate of Leadership with Distinction (3 core courses/1 elective) (12 credits)
► Certificate of Leadership (3 core courses) (9 credits)

Step 6 Workshop/Seminar Hours
Attend workshops and seminars designed to advance your leadership skills and competencies. Attend the CAL’s “MasterMind Meetings” on the first Monday of every month.
► Certificate of Leadership with High Distinction (45 hrs)
► Certificate of Leadership with Distinction (30 hrs)
► Certificate of Leadership (15 hrs)

Step 7 Leadership Experience
Play a leadership role in a project or program of your choice.
► Certificate of Leadership with High Distinction (60 hrs)
► Certificate of Leadership with Distinction (45 hrs)
► Certificate of Leadership (30 hrs)

Step 8 Capstone Experience
Interview leaders in your chosen major or profession and learn from them.
► Certificate of Leadership with High Distinction (5 interviews plus 7 page report)
► Certificate of Leadership with Distinction (3 interviews plus 5 page report)
► Certificate of Leadership (1 interview plus 3 page report)

Step 9 Portfolio Review and Certification
Each student who wishes to complete any of the three levels of the leadership certification will present a portfolio and review his or her accomplishments with a member of the CAL Staff to ensure all requirements have been completed.

Step 10 Use *The Center for the Advancement of Leadership to promote you to your next employer!*
After the portfolio review, each student will receive his or her Leadership Certificate, which will become an official part of his or her college transcript. The Center for the Advancement of Leadership will assist each student by writing a formal letter of recommendation, act as a reference, and generally promote each student as s/he applies for graduate school and/or seeks employment.

*Leadership Certificates are adaptable to every degree. See your Department Advisor for specifics.*
3 STEPS TO LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATION

For students interested in achieving leadership certification in a more streamlined fashion, a 3-Step model provides an opportunity for cultivating your personal, professional and leadership potential.

To complete the 3-Step Leadership Certification Program (LCP), simply complete the Leadership Certification Application form. Submit the form to the Center for the Advancement of Leadership, WB 236. Upon receipt of your application, the following requirements need to be demonstrated.

**Step 1 Coursework in Leadership**
Complete or have completed 3 of the 5 following leadership courses (no grade lower than a C-)
and one leadership elective (see green Leadership Courses and Electives document for options).
A total of 12 credits are required. A minimum GPA of 2.5 is required for certification.
► Principles of Leadership MGMT 1250 3 Credits
► Principles of Personal Excellence MGMT 2450 3 Credits
► Interpersonal Communication COMM 2110 3 Credits
► Principles of Management MGMT 3010 3 Credits
► Leadership Process MGMT 3500 3 Credits

**Step 2 Workshop/Seminar Hours**
Attend 15 hours of workshops and/or seminars, either on or off campus. This requirement is designed to advance your leadership skills and competencies. There are several options available to meet the requirements, including attending monthly MasterMind sessions, Executive Leadership Series, attending conferences, book reviews, and many others (see Leadership Certification Resources and Suggestions document for additional options). (Off-campus workshops must be pre-approved through Director, Dr. Bruce Jackson.)

**Step 3 Leadership Experience**
Participate in individual or team project(s) to enhance your leadership skills. A total of 60 hours is required. Students may demonstrate their leadership experience on campus (i.e., student government, clubs, service learning, etc.) or off campus (i.e., internships, service projects, etc.).
*With either on- or off-campus experiences – or a combination of options, students need to demonstrate that they have been in a leadership role.*
Keep copies of all your course syllabi, log your workshop/seminar hours and keep track of leadership experience hours. Tracking your progress in these areas is simple. Use the templates provided by the CAL (downloadable at www.uvu.edu/leadership, click on Student Resources). Upon completion of these requirements, simply review your accomplishments with the CAL director.
Once you have achieved Leadership Certification, use the CAL for ongoing support and promotion through personal letters of recommendation, character references, and acknowledgement of your achievement on your official college transcripts.*Leadership Certificate is adaptable to every degree; see your Department Advisor for specifics
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Student Leadership Development at Snow College
Principal Investigator: Alex A. Sanchez, Department of Education
Co-Investigator(s): Gordon N. Wilson, PhD Student, Department of Education

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in a research study. This study seeks to understand how, where and when leadership development occurs on a community college campus that requires formal and informal leadership training for student leaders. The objective is to “hear the lived experience” of former student leaders from Snow College. The goal of this study is to ascertain if personal leadership development did, in fact, take place during your time at the college. The results of the study will be presented as part of a student PhD Dissertation.

We are studying this because there is no research that has been found, which studies leadership development at community colleges. Yet, community colleges educate approximately 50 percent of all students in higher education. Most of the 4-year college and university studies are quantitative in nature, thus far, few look at leadership development from a qualitative perspective. This study will focus on student leadership development on a community college campus using a qualitative approach to gain data that will be analyzed and reported to the student researcher’s doctoral committee via the dissertation. There is hope that the information from this study will add to the body of knowledge about student leadership development and the aggregate results will ultimately be shared with professionals at other community colleges.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This consent form gives you the information needed to help you decide whether to participate in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not.
WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Your name was forwarded onto our research team by the former Dean of Students and former Director of Student Life. They identified you as a possible candidate for this research based on criteria related to your experience as a former student leader at Snow College. You were selected and are being invited to take part in this study because of your involvement as a former student leader.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

We will make arrangements to meet with you in a location where you will feel comfortable. Suggested locations may be a library study room, your office, the researcher’s office, or somewhere on the Snow College campus.

The consent form needs to be reviewed and signed if you agree with its content. Please ask any questions prior to signing the consent form.

There will up to 12 open-ended questions. The length of your answer will dictate the length of the interview. The questions will be specific to your experience as a student leader at Snow College. The researcher will ask for clarification for any response that is not totally clear.

After completing the initial interview, it is the intent of the researchers to set up, if possible, a focus group discussion to allow all participants to share their thoughts in hopes of capturing all possible experiences about student leadership development at Snow College. The goal is to make sure the data has been saturated in an attempt to gain an accurate understanding of leadership development at Snow College.

AUDIO RECORDING

Based on the nature of the study, the entire interview will be audio recorded. Are you comfortable being audio recorded? If you are uncomfortable with recording the interview, the researcher will scratch out the audio taping portion of the consent form and have you sign the revised form. This will indicate that you are comfortable with continuing the interview with the researcher taking hand-written notes. Please note, later the interview will be transcribed for further study and analysis. After transcribing the interview a copy will be sent to you the
participant to review for accuracy. Transcription copies will be available to you the participant upon request upon completion of the research project.

I understand and agree that I am going to be audio recorded as part of the interview.

Please initial ___________ Date ___________

I understand and do not agree to be audio recorded as part of the interview.

Please initial ___________ Date ___________

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?**

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort to you the participant.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

Benefits - There are no expected personal benefits to you, the participant.

**WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

No compensation will be provided to the participants of the study.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?**

Any information that you, the participant, share will remain confidential unless you choose to share it with others. You, or the other participant’s names, will not be made public. The researchers and the transcriptionist will only see your personal information. An alternate name or number will be assigned to protect your privacy. If the results of this project are published your identity will not be made public.

Federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

The research team will store the working copy and backup copy on the student researcher’s home institutions server at Salt Lake Community College, in order to
maintain control and confidentiality of the recordings. These files will be password protected. The research team will record this information using a digital recorder. The recordings will be kept for three years at the end of this period they will be electronically erased.

The transcription process will take place with a professional independent transcriber in Salt Lake City that works with research projects at the University of Utah. The research team will download the data files to the transcriber and then have it shipped back upon completion of the transcription.

DO I HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?
If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer.

You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You may skip any question during the interview that you prefer not to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: The Principal Investigator, Alex A. Sanchez, 541-737-8202, sancheza@oregonstate.edu, or the Student Researcher, Gordon N. Wilson, 801-808-4205, gordon.wilson@slcc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-4933, or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Name (printed):

_______________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

(Signature of Participant)   (Date)
Snow College Student Leadership and Life Principles
GNST 107R, Fall Semester

Instructor:
Office:
Phone:
Office Hours: By Appointment
Email:

Purpose: The purpose of this class is to provide information, create meaningful experiences, and encourage reflective learning in the area of personal leadership and life skills.

Goals: Students in this class may expect to gain the following based on their attendance and participation.

- Self-Discovery of personality and leadership style.
- Discovery and appreciation for diversity.
- An understanding of leadership theory.
- Formulation of your own leadership theory and identity as a leader.

Outline: This class is a two-credit hour class with meeting times on Monday from 12:30 p.m. to 1:20 p.m. and Wednesday from 12:30 p.m. to 1:20 p.m. The Monday class is devoted to ICC—Inter-Club Council, which is a club/student leader business meeting. The last Monday of every month is dedicated to a “last lecture series” presented by Snow College administration, faculty and staff. The Wednesday class is a lecture hour focused on personal leadership theory and skills. **If you are enrolled in the class for two credits, you must attend both the Monday and Wednesday classes in order to get credit. No exceptions!!!**

Grading: Each student will receive a letter grade for the class based on his or her attendance, participation, quizzes, writing assignments, group project and final exam. The point system used for the class is as follows:

22 instructions days at 10 points each = 220
5 writing assignments at 30 points each = 150
Written Final Exam = 100
Quizzes at 15 points each = 30
**Total Points = 500**

The points you earn during the course will help determine your grade. Grading for the course is established on a class curve; wherein attendance, assignments, quizzes, and the final exam are give equal weight in determining a final grade.

**Writing Assignments:** Your writing assignments are a personal reflection of your class learning. Writing assignments may take the form of personal essays, research reviews, or research papers. Your writing assignments are not group assignments! Writing assignments will not be accepted late. No exceptions!

**Quizzes:** Quizzes for this course will be posted on line through the course webpage. You can take them at your convenience. Quizzes may be taken once so read through the instructions and answer the GNST 107R 2 questions carefully. Each quiz will have a time limit. All quizzes must be completed prior to Thanksgiving Break or the student will receive a 0 for any incomplete quizzes.

**Final Exam:** The final exam is a comprehensive written final based upon all the lectures during the class. The final will be posted in the testing center or on-line to be completed by the date given by the instructor. No late finals are accepted—no exceptions.

**ADA Statement:** If you have questions or concerns regarding or ability to complete the requirements of this course and accommodations that can be made in your behalf, please contact:

**On-Line Course:** This course is available on-line through BlackBoard (an instructional platform used by the college). Each student enrolled in the class has access to class presentations, assignments, quizzes, and communication tools via the web-site. To log on to the website you must have a username and password. Your username is your email address and your password is your social security number. For example, if my email was apollo1234@snow.edu, then that would serve as my username. My Password would be the XXX-XX-XXXXX social security number.

You have been enrolled into the class by the email address provided to the Registration Office. If no email address is on record or if you have changed your email address, then you are not enrolled in the class. You must provide the
instructor with your most current email address in order to gain access to the class web-site.

Snow College Student Leadership and Life Principles
GNST 108R, Spring Semester

Instructor:
Office:
Phone:
Office Hours: By Appointment
Email:

Purpose: The purpose of this class is to provide information, create meaningful experiences, and encourage reflective learning in the area of group leadership and group dynamics.

Goals: Students in this class may expect to gain the following based on their attendance and participation.

- An understanding of group dynamics and group processes
- Discovery and appreciation for diversity
- Practical application in group learning and leadership skills
- Formulation of group leadership theory
- An active role in influencing positive change at Snow College
- New friendships

Outline: This class is a two-credit hour class with meeting times on Monday from 12:30 p.m. to 1:20 p.m. and Wednesday from 12:30 p.m. to 1:20 p.m. The Monday class is devoted to ICC—Inter-Club Council, which is a club/student leader business meeting. The last Monday of every month is dedicated to a “last lecture series” presented by Snow College administration, faculty and staff.

The Wednesday class is a lecture hour focused on group leadership theory, dynamics, and skills. Each student will be required to participate in a group as well as a group project that addresses a significant student and/or community need. **If you are enrolled in the class for two credits, you must attend both the Monday and Wednesday classes in order to get credit. No exceptions!!!**
Grading: Each student will receive a letter grade for the class based on his or her attendance, participation, quizzes, writing assignments, group project and final exam.

The point system used for the class is as follows:

- Discussion Board = 120 (24%)
- Individual Writing Assignments = 100 (20%)
- Group Assignments at 25 points each = 75 (17%)
- Group Presentation = 50 (10%)
- Group Evaluation at 50 points = 50 (10%)
- Written Final Exam = 50 (10%)
- Various Quizzes at 15 points each = 45 (9%)

Total Points = 490

This class is graded on a curve so that all assignments, presentations and so forth have equal weight in determining your grade.

Group Work: You will be assigned to work with a group of students in this class. This assignment provides you with practical experience to the lecture series. As a part of your group work, you will need to select a group project that fulfills a significant campus or community need. You will only have the semester in which to select, process, and implement the beginning stages of your project. Your group will receive assignments from the instructor that must be completed as a group and turned in on time. As a major portion of your grade, your group will grade your participation on this project. This means that you need to take this group assignment seriously as students tend to grade their peers more harshly than an objective instructor.

Group Assignments: In addition to your group work, you will have to complete group assignments. These assignments are designed to track the progress of your group. These assignments should be completed as a group with each member giving input or making some form of significant contribution. Only one report should be submitted per group with the names of all group members listed on the title page of the assignment.

Writing Assignments: Your writing assignments are a personal reflection of your class learning. Writing assignments may take the form of personal essays, research reviews, or research papers. Your writing assignments are not group assignments! Writing assignments will not be accepted late.
**Final Exam:** The final exam is a comprehensive written final based upon all the lectures during the class. The final will be posted in the testing center beginning the first day of Finals Week and must be completed within three days of its posting.

**ADA Statement:** If you have questions or concerns regarding or ability to complete the requirements of this course and accommodations that can be made in your behalf, please contact.
This background information will be discussed with each interviewee.

- This is a “phenomenological study.” This means that one goal of the research is to document the possible development of your leadership skills by asking you questions about your experiences as a student leader and as a formal student in leadership classes at Snow College.
- Questions will address both “formal” and “informal” experiences which took place at the College.
- “Formal” means class, workshop or Conference instruction, and other structured or “guided” experiences.
- “Informal” means personal interaction, observation or discussions with instructors, advisors, other student leaders or administrators.
- You will hear the term “lived experience.” This means your actual experience(s), good or bad or simply an experience which may have molded your approach to leadership.
- You will be asked to recall, to the best of your ability, the time you spent as a student leader at Snow College, and the experiences you had at that time.
- You will also be asked to reflect on those experiences from the perspective of your current status in your personal and professional life.
- You will not be personally identified in this study unless you choose to share information with others. You will be identified in this study by an alternate or pseudonym to help maintain confidentiality.
- You were given an Informed Consent form to review and sign. Do you have any questions or concerns that need to be discussed? Have you signed the form?

Potential questions that may be asked during the interview:

1. What years were you involved as a student leader at Snow College? Tell me about your leadership position(s)?
2. Tell me about any leadership skills or traits that you may have learned prior to your enrollment at Snow College.
3. Consider your experiences as a student leader; tell me about the leadership skills or traits you may have learned while you were involved at Snow College?

4. Describe how you may have changed or matured in your leadership style, skills or techniques because of those experiences as a student leader.

5. Tell me about the formal leadership class and discuss any leadership skills, techniques or traits you learned from the class.

6. Tell me about the “New Officer Training” program and share with me any leadership skills, techniques or traits you may have learned from the training program.

7. Tell me about your experience at the annual “Leadership Conference” and share with me any leadership techniques, skills or traits you may have learned from the conference.

8. Snow College regularly helped develop the curriculum for the annual “Utah Leadership Academy.” Tell me about your leadership experience at the Academy and what leadership skills, traits or techniques you may have learned there.

9. Describe any other “formal” leadership training you may have experienced at Snow College.

10. As a student leader at Snow College you were involved with student government advisors, class instructors, influential staff and various administrators. Tell me about any leadership skills, techniques or traits you may have learned or observed from those people.

11. Several years have passed since your student leadership experiences. Please describe any formal or informal leadership skills, traits or techniques that you use today which you learned at Snow College.

12. Were there any other “lived experiences” or observations that may have influenced your leadership skills or traits while at Snow College? Describe them.