EXPLORING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AMONGST STUDENTS ENGAGED IN RESIDENCE HALL COUNCIL

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Students learn how to be a leader and how to develop their leadership capacity as they participate in shared experiences or learning communities, many of which are facilitated by student affairs professionals through campus activities programs. For large numbers of college students, their first learning community, and subsequent path to future campus involvement, is their residential community. This qualitative study explored how participating in a residence hall council impacted students' conceptualization of leadership and their individual leadership development. Two overarching themes emerged. First, students do in fact build leadership capacity, motivation, and leadership efficacy from participating in collaborative, learning community environments, such as a hall council. Second, the role and behaviors of the learning community advisor matter, providing practical considerations for all student affairs practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a process and occurs in groups (Komives et al., 2013). This truth is at the heart of the work of student affairs educators' commitment to facilitate leadership learning. It is known that leadership development occurs throughout the college/university settings (Dunn et al., 2019; Haber-Curran, 2019). However, "students will find it difficult to lead until they have experienced effective leadership as part of their education" (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 2). Enter the student affairs practitioner. Part of the responsibilities of student affairs professionals is to provide learning opportunities for all students, within their sphere of influence, for personal growth and development, including leader and leadership development.

Students' involvement on campus occurs in a variety of ways, for a variety of reasons, and is often within the purview of student affairs professionals and paraprofessionals (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Campus involvement is a broadly defined term that ranges from 'one and done' experiences like a single day of community service, to weekend retreats or trainings, to week-long new student orientation camps, to multi-year student organizations. Student development or growth is a primary goal of these experiences, and that development often comes as a result of learning through a shared experience.

When students have prolonged engagement in a shared learning experience, a learning community can form. The benefits of learning communities are varied and lasting. As Dunn et al. (2016) noted, learning communities help students gain greater connection with their campus, increase their involvement on campus, and improve their academic performance. According to Cross (1998), "knowledge requires language, and people construct knowledge out of the language available to them in their community" (p. 5). For many students, their first collegiate learning community takes the shape of their residential community. Thus, a residential community is one of the first opportunities students have to get involved on campus; and just as many first experiences can influence subsequent similar experiences, a student's experience in and involvement through their residential community can influence their future campus involvement, residential or otherwise.

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As the student demographics of college campuses continue to diversify, it is important to understand what motivates students to get involved, if student affairs practitioners are to be effective. A student's motivation to get involved in activities beyond their courses is a dynamic construct that can be influenced by a variety of factors such as previous experiences, (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), developmental readiness (Keating et al., 2014), personal desires (Hamid & Krauss, 2013), or available resources. In fact, motivation may also influence the degree to which a student commits to or stays with an experience (Cho et al., 2015). Thus, this study was conducted to further populate the conversation regarding how involvement in residential hall councils fosters leadership learning in co-curricular offerings. While the specific context of this study was resident hall councils, the lessons learned may be transferable to other campus activities or involvement programs or initiatives where students serve as executive officers, councils, or teams and student affairs practitioners advise. The researchers leave it to the reader to make this determination.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Leadership is an essential asset within higher education and beyond. In our global post-industrial economy, leadership skills and abilities, such as teamwork and communication, top the list of skills employers want in their employees (Crawford & Fink, 2020). Subsequently, institutions of higher education have accepted the challenge to help develop the next generation of society's leaders (Keating et al., 2014; Rosch et al., 2015). However, leadership learning is not restricted to formal education settings; therefore, student affairs practitioners, regardless of functional area, play a vital role in advancing the student leadership learning that occurs on college campuses (Blake, 2007; Dunn et al., 2019; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Colleges and universities today offer students a wide variety of leadership engagement experiences: one-day conferences, semester-long seminar series, residential-based programming, student organizations, new student orientation programs, multi-year certificate programs, and countless others. With varying durations, commitment levels, costs, and theoretical grounding, students can find a leadership development opportunity that matches their individual needs, interests, and level of commitment.

As Day (2001) noted, leadership development is an overarching term used when discussing an individual's growth or advancement in their leadership capacity and competency over time. The two main components of leadership development are leadership education and leadership training (Brungardt, 1996). Leadership education, which typically occurs in a formal classroom setting, is the vehicle individuals who are committed to and engaged in leadership development use to learn, refine, and practice their leadership competencies over time (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Northouse, 2022). Leadership training, which typically occurs outside of a formal classroom setting, is a subset of leadership education and consists of learning the specific tasks needed for a specific job or responsibility (Brungardt, 1996).

Historically, student affairs viewed student leadership development as primarily leadership training rather than leadership education (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Roberts & Ullom, 1989). Workshops and other opportunities were directly tied to a position or job duties (i.e., training to be a Resident Assistant or the Student Body President or New Student Orientation Leader or Fraternity/Sorority Council President, etc.), focused primarily on specific leadership skills rather than holistic leader development, and were only open to students in those positions (Nuss, 2003). As the definition of leadership has shifted from one of title or position to one of influence, relationship, and process (Northouse, 2022), student affairs practitioners have likewise shifted their offerings from leadership training to leadership education open to all students regardless of academic program, position held, or level of involvement on campus (Haber, 2012; Shertzer et al., 2005).

Presenting leadership as a collaborative, influence process between leader and follower rather than training for a titled position, often challenges students' understanding of leadership as well as their categorization of who is and is not a leader (Shehane et al., 2012). Yet, processing the resulting cognitive dissonance associated with believing 'leaders' and 'leadership' exclusively pertain to those with a title or position, and then shifting to the belief that 'leader' and 'leadership' are concepts everyone has the capacity to cultivate, regardless of role or title within an organization, is a natural part of the leadership development process (Collier & Rosch, 2016), and a common experience for young adults. Knowledgeable student affairs practitioners can be an effective mecha-

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nism to support students as they process their cognitive dissonance regarding leadership; thereby aiding in the student's leadership development.

Leadership is an important factor in the conversation of student engagement (Komives, 2019). Through a host of curricular and co-curricular programs, students are able to interrogate their own beliefs, values, and perspectives; allowing all three to inform how they engage in groups and teams. In student groups, individuals gain in their perspective of others, grow in their own self-awareness, and question how their own identities inform their experience of the college/university in which they attend (Goodman, 2022). Thus, educators who work throughout and across student affairs functional areas, such as but not limited to student activities, student government advising, leadership programs, or service learning, can find value in this research involving Residence Hall Associations to guide their practice.

College can be a time fraught with transitions for young adults (Srivastava et al., 2009). Student involvement outside of the classroom, such as within residence hall councils, can support students in their development, community building, and overall retention in college (Astin, 1993; Mayhew et al., 2016; Tinto, 1993). Research shows, "residence hall involvement helps to model the process of community involvement for use later in students' lives" (Arboleda et al., 2003, p. 530).

Often, the invitation to get involved comes from more experienced fellow students, such as resident advisors (RA). An RA can be a basis of support, and an agent for cultivating a healthy living environment (Kacvinsky & Moreno, 2014). The contributions of RAs to the college experience have been well noted (see Arboleda et al. 2003; Brecheisen, 2015; Manata et al., 2017). Through social and educational programs, RAs provide residents opportunities to strengthen their strategies in finding success and belonging within the college/university setting.

Unlike many other student leaders or peer mentors, RAs are paid paraprofessional staff who are often supervised by hall directors. Riker (1980) described a hall director as a "coordinator, facilitator, consultant, teacher, administrator, counselor, change agent, planner, and researcher" (as cited in Beebe et al., 2018, p. 109). Beyond these descriptors, hall directors, who serve either in full-time staff positions or as part-time graduate assistants, are responsible for the day-to-day aspects of managing the residence hall, enforcing university policy, and cultivating a thriving residential community. Similar to RAs, hall directors play a significant role in the overall experience and co-curricular engagement of students living on-campus (Beebe et al., 2018).

But hall directors and RAs cannot create this thriving community on their own. If they are to be successful, they need the support of the residents they oversee. The hall council, student-volunteers who serve in a leadership capacity to deliver social programs intended to foster involvement from residents within the hall community, are vital (Arboleda et al., 2003). Working in concert with residence hall councils, RAs and hall directors provide the framing for an on-campus residential educational experience through programs, events, and services.

If student affairs professionals are to support emerging leaders, it is important to understand one's motivation to lead either through paid or volunteer positions, which in the case of residence halls includes being an RA (paid) or participating on the hall council (unpaid). Motivation is an essential component of leadership development (Porter et al., 2019), as an individual's motivation influences if leader development occurs and the depth of that development (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Priest & Middleton, 2016). Kark and Van Dijk (2007) suggest the opportunity for advancement can also be a key factor in one's consideration to lead. Additionally, insights into an individual's motivation can be assessed through understanding their personal values and leadership self-efficacy (Schyns et al., 2020).

PURPOSE

Given the possibilities for students to further their leadership development through involvement in collaborative, peer-led learning communities such as residence hall councils, and the limited exploration of the subject matter, the aim of this study was to better understand and describe how participating in a residential hall council

influences students' leadership development. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do students describe their experience participating in hall council?
2. How do students describe leadership and subsequently what influence did hall council participation play in their description?
3. What general recommendations do council leaders have for advisors working with hall councils?

Note, the terms "hall council" and "area council" are used interchangeably throughout this piece to reflect the various ways college residential governing councils are named/described at different institutions.

METHODOLOGY

The study was framed in the understandings of contemporary and post-industrial notions of leadership (Dugan, 2017; Northouse, 2022) as well as Alexander Astin's "I-E-O Model" which speaks to the impact of college experiences on student development (Astin, 1993). We (the researchers) sought to explore the experiences of students in 'positional' roles of leadership within a hall/an area council. It is worth noting, while the term 'positional leader,' as it relates to hall/area council, is used to name the type of participant who would be targeted for this study, we (the researchers) recognize leadership is not positional (Dugan, 2017; HERI, 1996; Northouse 2022) and therefore, while position was used as a factor, it was not the sole determinant for participation in this study. We posit, the term 'positional leader' can easily be replaced with a qualifier such as 'holds responsibility within hall/area council.' This distinction of conditions, and the subsequent use of both sets of terminology in our recruitment ensured the study remained inclusive of the various ways students understand, enact, and describe their leadership within residence hall councils. The only explicit requirement for eligibility in the study was at least two years of involvement (not required to be two consecutive years, but in most cases were) within a hall council. The approach described here outlines a multifaceted study with two institutional points of contact, diverse experiences of participants, and a set of rich narratives that can inform practice for leadership and student affairs educators alike.

The central focus of the study was to understand if students who were involved in a collaborative, peer-led learning community experienced recognizable growth in their leadership capacity and competency through their participation in a residential hall council (i.e., leadership skills, abilities, or behaviors; individual growth; etc.). As a result of the qualitative and exploratory nature of this study, narrative analysis was the main framework utilized for gathering and analyzing data (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Narrative analysis continues to grow in importance as a relevant technique in exploring an individual's understanding of an experience. Personal stories are an integral part of narrative analysis (Meraz et al., 2019). Stories allow those who conduct a study a constructive way to analyze an experience (Frank, 2002). This study looked at individual experiences and elicited personal stories as a way of understanding hall council participants' grasp of leadership and the contributions involvement in residential hall councils played on their overall leadership efficacy and engagement.

Gatekeepers at four institutions (one large public, one mid-size public, one mid-size Jesuit-Catholic, and one highly selective private) were used to recruit participants for this study. Each of the four institutions that agreed to the study submitted an official 'letter of cooperation' as part of the IRB process at the Jesuit-Catholic university. Each gatekeeper served in an administrative leadership role within Residence Life, but did not have direct oversight/advising of residence hall councils. Participants were purposefully selected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) using these gatekeepers (Johnson & Christensen, 2017) to ensure the participants' experiences would complement the research questions of this study. Prior to the recruitment of participants, the gatekeepers and the research team spoke over the phone in length to discuss the research, the engagement of participants, and the parameters for eligibility to participate in the study. The research team wrote recruitment emails, which the gatekeepers sent to those they deemed eligible to participate in the study.

Limitations

After a ten-week recruitment process, eight participants from two of the four institutions agreed to participate in the study (two from a large public and six from a Jesuit-Catholic institution). Because the study was carried out over the summer, the student's availability became the primary determinant in their ability to take part in this research and is a limitation of this study. Additionally, students were selected at the recommendations of

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gatekeepers at each of the two respective institutions. These gatekeepers carried rapport with the members of this study and that rapport could cause bias in students' experience, perspective, and responses to the questions asked. Despite the considerations offered on the limitations within the sample, there is still high confidence that the findings within this study render valuable insights and contributions to advising philosophy and approach.

Interview Protocol

Once participants were identified, and with the support of four graduate student research assistants, participant interviews were conducted over a six-week period. Each semi-structured participant interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. The interviews took place via video conferencing and were recorded, as approved by the IRB. Participants received a $20 gift card for participating in the study.

An interview guide approach was used as the interview method to collect data for this study (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). This approach allowed for participants to not only share their responses, but also allowed the interviewer to ask probing and follow-up questions to elicit greater understanding as the interview progressed (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Each interview was semi-structured (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with a series of main and potential, subsequent probing questions used to direct the interview. Interview questions asked included questions such as: What does leadership look like to you? Beyond leadership, what were the other motivating factors that contributed to your decision to get involved in hall council? Now having served on hall council, how have you seen leadership growth and development within yourself? As it relates to your own leadership development while on hall/area council, what are the ways the experience could further enhance your view of leadership? What final recommendations would you offer to advisors/directors (student affairs administrators) to help support the leadership development of hall/area council members?

After the interviews were completed, transcribed verbatim using a transcription service, and approved by the individual participant, the researchers individually analyzed each interview looking for common themes. The researchers began with open coding of the transcribed responses, to unitize the data, followed by axial coding, to construct categories within the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Once each member of the research team analyzed and coded the data, the team came together for a peer debriefing of the findings to ensure the plausibility and agreement of the codes and categories developed across each member of the research team's observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once the research team agreed to the codes and categories developed, the categories were then clustered into themes utilizing a deductive method. The themes were later used to frame the findings of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Nasheeda et al., 2019).

Data Analysis

Maintaining trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Trustworthiness is described in terms of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Dependability was increased through an audit trail, where all data were coded by individual participants. To maintain anonymity, each participant was given a unique number, i.e., Student 1 or Student 7. By the end of the eight interviews, no new insights came to light, even after asking additional probing questions, thus the interview team determined data saturation had occurred (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility was developed through member checking (Johnson & Christensen, 2017) by providing each participant an opportunity to review, correct, or clarify, as needed, their verbatim transcription of their interview. All interviews were approved as transcribed. Confirmability was developed through peer debriefing sessions between the research team and the lead author as well as between the two authors. Thick description and representative quotes were used to increase transferability across context and to ensure each unique voice was represented; however, the authors acknowledge that the reader is primarily responsible to determine transferability from the research context to their own.

To enhance credibility, the research team bracketed our collective personal experiences working with leadership development initiatives, such as residential hall councils, prior to conducting any data analysis. The first author has over 15 years of experience working within student affairs in higher education and for the past seven years has served as a faculty member within higher education and leadership studies. With leadership at the center of

his practical and scholarly endeavors, the subject matter is one in which he values and believes is an integral part of the student engagement process. His commitment to this line of research is deeply rooted in the belief that student engagement and involvement are the keystones to leadership, community, and belonging within college and university settings.

The second author has over 25 years of experience working with college students. Her professional experience includes over five years as a leadership education faculty member and 15 years as a student affairs practitioner, where she worked with peer mentors in a living-learning community, student government student leaders, multi-institutional leadership conferences, and other co-curricular leadership development initiatives. By honoring, acknowledging, and discussing our individual experiences with and assumptions of hall councils, the authors intentionally worked to separate our experiences from the voices of the participants through the process of epoche (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

FINDINGS

The narrative analysis of the interview responses led to a better understanding of students' motivation to get involved in a residential hall council, how participating in a hall council influenced students' conceptualization of leadership, and the influence student affairs practitioners, in this case hall council advisors, have on the students so engaged. Two overall themes emerged from the data: (1) being involved in collaborative, peer-led learning communities like residential hall councils help students build their leadership capacity, motivation, and leadership efficacy, and (2) the role and behaviors of the student affairs advisor matter to students. The findings are presented by research question.

To address research question one, all participants were asked to describe their experience being part of a residence hall council, including what motivated them to get involved in said hall council. Each interviewee had a positive reaction to their participation on their hall council. Many were motivated by a desire to connect with their fellow students and found the experience helpful in their efforts to do so. The following four representative quotes highlight this sentiment. One student said, "it's [being on hall council] a great way to make friends, it's a great way to use the resources you have" (Student 5). A second student commented that "I really wanted to get involved and get to know people that I thought were going to be a good influence ... so I could bond with people in my hall" (Student 3). Another student mentioned they got involved because "I wanted to meet people ...Getting to know people can be kind of intimidating" (Student 8). A fourth student related they got involved in their hall council because "I really wanted to meet a lot of people on my hall ... to have fun" (Student 4).

To address research question two, all participants were asked two specific questions. First, they described what leadership looks like to them and second, they discussed how their participation on the hall council influenced their understanding of leadership. Three sub themes emerged during the data analysis process (Motivation to Get Involved, Definition of Leadership, and Personal Development), which the researchers summarized as the Antecedents for Hall Council Participation and representative quotes for each theme are included in Table 1.

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Table 1: *Student Voices: Antecedents for Participation in a Hall Council*

Theme	Example Quotes
Motivation to get involved	I went into [institution] wanting to take up a lot of leadership roles, wanting to do stuff for my community, lead things 'cause I feel like leading people, doing projects, I think are fun (Student 1) ...this one [being on hall council] really didn't seem exciting to me. I just thought it would be something nice that I can help contribute to, especially since my dorm is all honors program kids so I thought it'd be a nice way to really make an impact with my immediate dormitory (Student 2)
Definition of Leadership	For me [leadership] is ... More than just showing people how to act, it's living it in yourself, and I feel like it's showing others, through who you are as a person, how to be more themselves ... It's showing people how to be a better them (Student 3) Leadership is listening (Student 4) [Leadership] is not just one person demanding or directing everything, it's more how you can be a part of the group and have a voice, and they take you serious[ly], and they respect you, and making sure that within the group everyone is heard, and that what the group is working towards is efficient. Just because I'm not labeled as a president of the club doesn't mean I can, I ... still have a say and put my input in it. I think I can still be a leader without having that label as being a president (Student 5) I would say it [being on hall council] enhanced and kinda [sic] chiseled away at my previous idea of what leadership was, in the way that I probably, as a freshman, thought that leadership was just somebody who everybody followed, when what's not what it is (Student 8)
Personal Development	What made me grow is that people didn't give me that spoon-feeding you everything, they let me learn it on my own while giving me guidance along [the] way (Student 3) I've never had a leadership position before and this was like my first crack at it and I really enjoyed it. It led me to different ideas, different outlooks, different perspectives of different people. I guess I always know [sic] the world wasn't always like my view is the right view, but it's like just seeing so many varying views. It's just so eye-opening and just being like, "wow, that's so cool. I never really thought of it that way (Student 4) Playing with the group is very difficult, especially when everyone's so different ... But at the end of the day, we always have to decide how we're gonna [sic] execute it ... So I think hall council and my leadership grew through trying to be open ears to everyone and even myself and then seeing where compromises can be made (Student 5) I definitely saw myself grow this year. A lot of eye opening things happened. It was the first time I was buying for an entire school. An entire apartment complex. I really enjoyed having people to lean on my ideas ... There has been a lot of growth in ... just my abilities to talk to people (Student 4)

For the students interviewed, leadership was initially viewed as a concept directly tied to a position or specific task that needed to be accomplished. For example, Student 2 mentioned a leader is found in "some hierarchy where there are people kind of giving out orders and other people kind of following that." Similarly, another student commented, "leadership looks something like a person working together with the rest of the team, like giving them tasks [to do]" (Student 1). Yet, when the students began discussing their experiences with their hall councils, their perspectives of leadership shifted. Working on the hall council helped them see that leadership was more about a process and less about a position or title. This shift is represented in the quotes detailed in Table 1 and can be summarized in the quote from Student 8, who commented that being a part of the hall council "chiseled away at their previous conceptualization of leadership."

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To address research question three, each student was asked to reflect on their experience with their hall council advisors. Overwhelmingly, students had a positive experience working with their advisor. Two sub themes emerged when reviewing the data, which the researchers summarized as the Impact of the Student Affairs Practitioner and representative quotes are detailed in Table 2. The first sub theme being the positive, personal characteristics and qualities students recognized and appreciated in their advisors. The interviewees repeatedly commented how important it was to maintain good communication between the advisor and the hall council, as a whole, as well as between council members themselves. For example, one student commented that good communication "has to come from the advisor" because the students are new at this and may not have a lot of experience working in these types of situations (Student 8). But the students also found it as important to note that good communication skills also come with the ability to be comfortable in the silence when no one is speaking (Student 4) and the ability to really listen to their students while creating the space for students to share their ideas as they feel comfortable to do so (Student 6).

Table 2: *Student Voices: Impact of Student Affairs Practitioners*

Theme	Example Quotes
Characteristics of Good RHA Advisors	I always appreciate when a leader or teacher listens to me, when they make the effort to listen to me or make the effort to try and incorporate me and ask me what I feel because ... I'm not always going to give my opinion right away, especially in larger groups. (Student 6)
	Having good communication between the Hall directories and the members themselves ... I never spoke to my Hall Counselor Director ever. Not as a resident, not as a person in the Hall Council. Maybe in a group conversation, but definitely never directly. And so I think that might have also played a role in my lack of knowledge about what expectations were to be held of me and what responsibilities I had. (Student 2)
	Do not be discouraged if you hear nothing but silence ... A lot of times people are thinking, trying to figure out "will this actually work?" ... Don't take silence for granted, like people are thinking. Don't blast into a whole nother [sic] speech. Try to hear a little bit from everybody. (Student 4)
	Encouraging people to give their opinions ... Some people are more vocal than others, are more opinionated and stuff. So sometimes they kinda [sic] dominate what is going on or what's being decided on and sometimes people don't feel as free to express their opinion, especially when it differs ... sometimes people need a little push, a little of encouragement to do that. (Student 7)
Improved Practice	Encourage their council to take on ambitious projects ... Because most often, when you're pushed to your limit or you're doing something difficult, that's when you learn the most and that's when you develop the most as a person. (Student 1)
	Hall council members [need] to reach out more to the community rather than ... It's good to be able to collaborate as a group and just accomplish to what you want to, but we're doing it for the community, so it's important to reach out. (Student 7)

The second sub theme that emerged was improved practice, but the students did not solely focus on the need for their advisors to improve. Indeed, they recognized that success in a hall council only comes when council members and the advisor are united. For example, Student 7 mentioned that students on the hall council need to "be observant [and] get feedback." Another student addressed the importance of having all members of the council, advisor as well as students, "feel comfortable talking with each other and comfortable working with each other" (Student 2). This shift demonstrates that the students understand that it takes more than just the advisor to keep the council moving forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study offer a number of considerations for practice for the profession, including those who work beyond residence hall councils. First, and especially for those who work with first-year students, student affairs professionals should remain mindful that involvement in the organization they advise, may be for most students their first entry point into campus engagement and formal leadership opportunities on campus. With this in mind, advisors should consider in their approach to student mentorship and in the opportunities introduced to students how they are being purposeful and developmental in their work, which supports previous research that initial campus involvement opportunities influence students' subsequent involvement (Lichterman & Bloom, 2019).

Second, practitioners are well advised to intentionally develop engagement within their learning community, organization, council, or program as a leadership development opportunity. Educators should work with students to curate an operationalized definition of leadership and what it means to lead within the specific context of that learning community, organization, council, or program; this provides a common language for both students and advisors as they embark on this developmental opportunity (Lichterman & Bloom, 2019). Rather than approaching advising from a directive schema, advisors should ask students questions that elicit critical thinking and allow them to self-author, design, and lead with intentionality (Baxter Magolda, 2008) the types of experiences they desire out of their co-curricular experience.

The findings from this study highlight the idea that student affairs educators, specifically those advising collaborative, peer-led learning communities such as hall/area councils, should intentionally focus on their communication with students, challenge students to set ambitious goals for themselves and the organization as a whole, and view setbacks as part of the leadership learning process. We propose these findings are not exclusive to educators within residence life, but also apply to all who advise student organizations, councils, and programs. Thereby, reinforcing the educational and learning aspects of student affairs work. Students want to feel as though advisors believe in their potential as leaders and see them as young adults with the capacity and efficacy to affect change in their communities (Parks, 2011). Furthermore, student affairs practitioners should adopt an approach to advising that validates students in their questions and opinions. Serving in essence as a consultant rather than a supervisor will allow students the space to develop the cognitive and leadership capacities and competencies that will best celebrate their involvement (Guthrie & Chunoo, 2018).

Advisors should spend time working to develop community within the membership of their organization, council, or program. Through team building exercises, on-boarding activities, and intra-personal activities at the beginning of meetings, advisors can support students in building connections with their peers that may have a lasting impact on their overall experience and retention at the college/university (Tinto, 1993). As educators, advisors should remain mindful in how they use their platform to support learning (Keeling, 2006; Lichterman & Bloom, 2019). Advisors should make intentionality their top priority by being deliberate and consistent in their communication and advising; scaffolding their conversations so that they strike the balance of the challenge, support, and readiness (Sanford, 1966 as cited in Patton et al., 2016) of the students they serve. Finally, student affairs practitioners should engage in routine assessments with and from the students who lead the learning community, organization, council or program and consider the ways (formally and informally) they can receive formative and summative feedback in their role as an educator committed to the leadership learning and development of their students.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences of students involved within residence hall councils and the impact of those experiences on their leadership learning and development. Three central questions were asked in the study to further understand students' perspective, insights, and recommendations on how hall council engagement can continue to support the leadership learning and development of students. The findings illuminated the importance of collaborative learning community involvement and subsequent advising in shaping students' understanding of leadership. Secondly, student affairs practitioners working with collaborative, learning communities, organizations, councils, or programs should adopt an approach to advising that challenges students to set high

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expectations for themselves and their peers, while offering support and encouragement to the students. Finally, advisors need to be intentional in how they cultivate community among students involved in the organization, council, or program they advise. While originally centered on the experience of residence hall councils, we believe these findings have meaning and value for any student affairs practitioner who advises a student organization, council, learning community, or program.

The times in which we live (social/political strife, post COVID-19 pandemic, etc.) amplify the need for and importance of community, engagement, and student affairs educators who are dedicated to the practice of using involvement as a tool to further support student leadership growth, development, and learning (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018).

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