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A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF ORIENTATION LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON  
THE IMPACT OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN ORIENTATION

by

ROCHELLE N. RAMIREZ

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

May 2019

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The topic of my dissertation would not have been possible if not for the many young lives I've had the opportunity to work with as orientation leaders. You have inspired me to work harder and commit to every aspect of orientation planning. I am very proud of the individuals you have grown into and know you will each make your distinct mark on this world. I will forever cherish the time I was able to spend working with each of you. A special thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Arthur Hernandez, I appreciate the many long hours you spent guiding my countless drafts. I truly learned a lot from you. To Dr. Jessica Kimmel, who has always been an immense source of strength and support throughout my tenure as a doctoral student. I will always hold great admiration for you and for your dedication to all students. I strive to be more like you every day. I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Tarciscio Beal for his expertise and guidance in the final stages of my project. Without the many long hours, he dedicated to coaching me along the final phase of work; this project would not have been possible. To Dr. Raúl Zendejas, thank you for paving the road before me. You have managed to keep this process light and fun "old friend." To the late Dr. Rick Henderson and Dr. Dorothy Ettling, I could hear your voices loud and clear coaching me along throughout this journey. Thank you for providing the best foundation possible to take on this work. Lastly, to Dr. Absael Antelo, thank you for your kind words of support and for chairing my committee in the beginning stages. I will forever be grateful for your support.

Rochelle N. Ramirez

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation in memory of my loving father. I very much appreciate all of our weekend excursions when I was growing up and our many lunch dates throughout the years. I learned the value of hard work, precise detail, and dedication to a job well done from you. I would also like to dedicate this study to my mother, who has always supported my dreams. Your hard work and commitment to all my endeavors has meant the world to me. And finally, to all the amazing orientation leaders who not only made my job fun and easy, but also served as the inspiration to this dissertation. I am grateful for your dedication to my project and for helping me succeed in work and school. You are all very special to me.

## A STUDY OF ORIENTATION LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN ORIENTATION

Rochelle N. Ramirez

University of the Incarnate Word, 2019

Theory suggests students benefit when they become involved in co-curricular activities outside the classroom (Astin, 1993). While there is some literature on college orientation programs, most is dated and focuses on the participants attending orientation, providing little knowledge on the student orientation leaders who help execute the programs (Pierson & Timmerman, 2004). Therefore, this grounded theory study was conducted to describe the details of the participants' lived experiences serving as orientation leaders. The intent of this qualitative study was to extract meaning and understanding from the orientation leaders' personal accounts and their unique interpretations of their experiences. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 8 orientation leaders who led orientation at a private university. Data were analyzed using a constant comparative method resulting in 13 codes emerging from the first phase of analysis. After a more in-depth analysis and further categorization, 3 dominant categories emerged from the codes and observation notes. Although initial feelings of nervousness, insecurity, and hesitation to participate were shared, many participants mentioned feeling a sense of accomplishment and growth as they collaborated through the experience with their peers. In addition, orientation leaders felt that working as a leader on campus helped them feel more positively connected to the university. It is anticipated that study results will help to inform the discipline and profession about the dynamics, which explain how student leaders are impacted

through the orientation leader process. It is also hoped that this research will inform faculty and college administrators concerning community building through engagement, be responsive to student's needs, and aid in the development of student leaders and the orientation program.

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## **Chapter I – Leading Orientation**

A study by Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) demonstrates a connection between earning a bachelor's degree and long term social, cognitive, and economic benefits for individuals. Information from their study of 6,000 students attending 18 baccalaureate-granting institutions examined the relationship between student engagement, college GPA, and persistence. These authors evaluated data from the National Survey of Student Engagement, academic transcripts, merit aid, and ACT/SAT scores. From these facts, they theorized that students' grades and persistence to degree completion benefit from engagement in educationally purposeful activities. In addition, these benefits can potentially influence future generations of the individual's family and enhance the overall quality of life of college-educated individuals and their communities.

While earning a college degree has demonstrable benefits, the road to graduation can be treacherous as students may face various obstacles during their years of study. Internal factors such as, challenging curriculum and the time commitment of several years to reach their academic goal, and external factors, such as family obligations and work requirements can all hinder their success and prevent a student from reaching their graduation. One way students can alleviate obstacles to their success is by becoming more closely connected to their institution. Cuseo (1997) reports of studies that consistently show the most successful students connect to their university through involvement. Astin defines involvement as an activity outside the classroom in which student learning may be enhanced (Astin, 1993). Maintaining involvement in college is one of the most important things students can do to remain successful (Astin, 1993). Astin's theory, published in 1984, explains the importance of student involvement in college. His

theory goes on to cover how students change and develop from becoming involved in co-curricular activities.

Another term found in the literature is student engagement, which denotes the time and energy students invest in school activities (Kuh, 2001). One way Cuseo (1997) suggests students connect to their university is by “engaging” in the learning process outside the classroom. Student engagement, defined in the literature as, “participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom which leads to a range of measurable outcomes” (Kuh et al., 2008). Additionally, it is defined as “the extent to which students are engaging in activities that higher education research has shown to be linked with high-quality learning outcomes” (Krause & Coates, 2008, p. 493). Hu and Kuh (2003) also define engagement as “the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes.” Conversely, others have defined engagement as the process whereby institutions make intentional attempts to involve and empower students in shaping their learning experience (HEFCE, 2008). Synthesizing these viewpoints, Kuh (2009) has defined student engagement as “the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (Kuh, 2001, 2003, 2009). Cuseo (1997), Astin (1993), and other scholars (e.g. Kuh et al., 2008) argue that students who become socially integrated within campuses typically remain in college and eventually complete their degrees.

Although researchers have used different terminologies to label student engagement and how it may impact student success, the majority of scholars agree that students learn from what they participate in while in college (Kuh, 2009). Astin’s research also indicates that students who become involved in campus activities are more likely to enjoy their college experience, graduate

from college, and improve leadership skills (Astin, 1993). Researchers have confirmed that students involved in campus activities are more engaged in the campus community and succeed more academically (Webber, Krylow, & Zhang, 2013). Furthermore, Astin (1993) developed the theory that students show an increased interest in their curriculum when they participate in campus programs and services with fellow students. Scholars exploring student involvement in colleges have agreed with Astin's (1993) theory, and report that when students actively participate in college activities, they better connect to friends, establish better rapport with faculty, and enhance their critical thinking skills (Astin, 1993; Bauer & Bennett, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Pike, Kuh, & Massa-McKinley, 2008). Astin's theory builds on Tinto's (1975) student integration model, which is still prevalent in the literature on student engagement. Tinto's model suggests that students who integrate socially into their campus community by becoming involved are more committed to their institution and are more likely to graduate. Tinto's (1987 and 1993) clarifies his longitudinal model by including three general facets which suggest that students (a) enter college with various levels of academic preparation and attributes; (b) develop different levels of integration into the institution's academic social system, such as their grades and attitudes about their academic progress; and (c) develop different levels of integration into an institution's social system, which references how they interact with peers. Tinto proposed that if academic and social integration are positive, commitment and motivation to persist in attaining a degree increase and high levels of either type of integration, academic or social integration, could potentially offset low levels of the other facet for determining persistence.

One of the ways colleges promote student involvement is by creating opportunities for leadership and participation through student led orientation programs, social clubs, and campus

events. Higher education literature provides evidence that involvement in leadership opportunities helps students to become academically and socially invested in the institution and less likely to drop out (Astin, 1993; Astin & Cress, 2004; Kuh & Hu, 2001).

### **Institution Retention**

When institutions find ways to foster student involvement and engagement, they add to the quality of the student's education (Kuh, 2009). Kuh (2009) argues that institutions can influence the development of a sense of community among students by enhancing engagement on campus. Student involvement and the student's connection to their university community are factors that correlate with retention (Hunter, 2006). Additionally, retaining students until graduation is a direct fulfillment of the mission of most institutions of higher learning (Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim, & Wilcox, 2013). Student retention, defined as continuous enrollment until completion of a degree, is viewed as an important measure of institutional effectiveness (Tinto, 1975) and also as a way to increase student success. Student success includes academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, and the persistence and attainment of educational objectives, according to Kuh et al. (2008). To maximize and ensure student success, colleges and universities have increased their efforts to identify and improve retention at their institutions and retention has received a great deal of attention in the literature (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Many institutions have invested significant amounts of money to develop and enhance retention programs and services such as first-year seminars, advising interventions, and tutoring services. These strategies are designed to increase student retention by meeting student needs to provide the necessary skills to help them graduate (Calcagno & Long, 2008; Tinto, 2007). From an economic standpoint, it is more cost

effective for institutions to retain currently enrolled students rather than recruit new ones.

Astin (1993) proposes that in addition to in-class engagement, students involved in campus-wide activities such as student organization activities, special presentations, or intramurals athletics, better adapt to their environment, thus improving retention and graduation rates. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that student engagement or, by their definition, the amount of time and energy a student devotes to college in general, has a positive link to desired outcomes of undergraduate education. Examples of student engagement can include time spent studying, or participating in on-campus student organizations, or working on campus increases interaction with other students, faculty, and staff. In other words, students who engage in campus activities spend more time on campus developing a connection to the university (Astin, 1993). Astin (1993), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) theorize that the greater the student involvement in college, the more likely the student is to graduate.

Establishing relationships with other members of the campus community is also crucial to institution retention among students. Positive interactions with faculty members and peers increase the likelihood that students will succeed to graduation (Reason, 2009). Pritchard & Wilson (2003) draw upon Upcraft and Gardner's (1989) research and suggests that the development of peer-driven social support can be critical to student success. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also support the notion that peer interactions improve student academic performance. Furthermore, strong peer support networks comprised of other student mentors or leaders strengthens social development for students (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005).



## **Orientation Programs as Tools for Retention**

Scholars define orientation programs as a “collaborative institutional effort to enhance student success by assisting students and their families with acclimating to the new college environment” (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005, p. 391). Moreover, it is one of the first ways colleges facilitate peer interaction to introduce campus resources and student-led organizations to new students. New student orientation has also become a retention tool and most colleges begin their retention efforts in the summer preceding the students’ first fall semester (Bai, 2001; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Braxton, 2000; Mann, 1998; Tinto, 1993, 1998). In the 1990s, scholars began linking orientation to retention efforts at universities and the goal of creating a “staying” environment for students was initiated (Noel, Levitz, Saluri, & Associates, 1986; Tinto, 1993). Institutional administrators quickly comprehended the value of orientation programs and concluded the upfront investment to retain students was worth the cost of replacing a student lost through attrition.

The premise of orientation is to help familiarize students with academic policies, introduce them to student organizations, and select courses for their first semester of college. Orientation programs are frequently found in most colleges and primarily focus on undergraduate student populations although there are programs offered for transfer and graduate students as well. During most orientation programs, students have the opportunity to meet their peers, faculty, and staff, learn about campus resources available to them, and learn more about the academic programs and degrees offered from the institution. The agenda of the orientation day generally includes several information sessions in which individuals come to anticipate and understand the values that characterize their new social setting and expectations as members of their new community (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). These series of experiences help reduce anxiety while they acclimate to their new college environment (Mann, 1998).

Research on orientation programs suggests that participating in orientation helps a student to determine if their desired university is a good fit for their academic goals. In addition, the programs promote social interaction among participants by offering social interaction or icebreaker type activities with current students and staff as part of their scheduled activities of the day. This can potentially have positive effect in terms of retention for incoming student's seeking to belong to their new university environment (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986). While participation in orientation had a small effect on student persistence, the main influence was on freshmen year social integration. In fact, it appears from this study that, orientation aided students' initial ability to cope with new social challenges while in their new environment. Students participating in orientation may not know or understand how to be college students. In addition, they may not be aware of the resources in place to help them be successful, such as career offices, tutoring centers and writing labs. At orientation, students learn about these resources and meet several of the student affairs professionals who will help them along their journey as college students. During this process of learning to navigate their new social climate, students begin to develop as a member of the social system of the institution and as a result, orientation programs can become an important tool to help retain enrolled students. Orientation leaders serve as an institution's facilitator in helping incoming students and families become adjusted to their new environment (Mann, Andrews, & Rodenburg, 2010). Moreover, orientation leaders are often viewed as "vital customer service resources working as both educators and public relations agents" for their universities (Mann et al., 2010, p. 55). Leaders often spend the majority of the orientation day with incoming students and as a result, play a substantial role in easing the transition to college for incoming students. Although the goal of most orientations is to assist first-year students' transition to their university, understanding how programs affect

orientation leaders who facilitate these programs is also important (Mann, et al., 2010).

Orientation programs can be costly to execute. Expenses can include publications, signage, catering, giveaways (welcome t-shirts/bags), student leader and staff salaries, etc. In addition to visiting the Admissions Office or Welcome Center, students can form their first impressions of the university and staff while attending orientation. Often times, orientation professionals spend many hours planning programming and training personnel to work during orientation.

Institutions can potentially suffer financially if after attending orientation, the student decides not to attend the university. In addition, each student attending orientation has the potential to bring tuition revenue into the university for the next 4 years; losing one or two students can have a negative impact on the institution's revenue. After several years of being comprehensively involved with the planning and implementation of these programs, I participated in site visits at nearby institutions in South Texas and became familiar with their orientation processes, as well as, discussed best practices in the field. I learned and sought out much of this information during my interactions with those professional colleagues.

Leading orientation is a good example of a co-curricular activity in college because it involves initiating icebreakers, helps new students acclimate to campus, and improves/increases social interaction with peers and faculty. Tinto (1993) defines social integration as incorporating a student into a larger campus group or community of students. This form of social integration is typically significant in successfully retaining students, but also helps them achieve their goal to graduate. Simply stated, students who interact with and have close friends, as classmates are likely to feel satisfied with their college experience and feel they fit in. In addition, the quality of the connections, which students establish with academic staff and their peers, is necessary for

successful social integration and is helpful for student retention in higher education (Qualter, Whiteley, Morley & Dudiak, 2009).

### **Role of Orientation and Its Leaders**

Orientation programs are designed to offer an introduction to the college campus, and also positively contribute to the incoming student's transition to college. Therefore, recruiting orientation staff members who provide a positive experience for new students is essential. Orientation Leaders (OLs) are typically the first peers incoming families meet at their university. Thus, it is important to devote adequate time and attention to the orientation leader training process.

Recruiting and training orientation leader staff should begin by determining the characteristics required of a student who will successfully carry out the OL role at his or her institution. It is also important to build a staff that is representative of the campus. Pretty (2004) noted that "orientation leaders should be a reflection of the institution in terms of majors, gender, age, involvement experiences, class standing, ethnicity, hometowns, transfer status, and so forth" (p. 11). This helps ensure incoming students feel a sense of institutional fit or the ability to envision themselves attending the university. In addition, a diverse balance of personality styles on the orientation leader team is important because balance allows new students access to leaders who help them "gravitate toward styles that are comfortable for them" (Pretty, 2004, p. 11). Some orientation leaders are natural public speakers and possess the ability to allow students to feel easily engaged in presentations. Other leaders are more reserved, but are equally important to the team's behind the scenes set up and planning initiatives.

Another important aspect of developing orientation leaders is thorough the orientation leader training. The training process typically begins soon after hiring the orientation leaders to

help continue the excitement of the selection process for the position (Abraham, Nesbit, & Ward-Roof, 2003). Institutions offer different types of orientation programs, such as one-day programs, two-day overnight programs, or weeklong programs that take place the summer before classes begin in fall. Depending on the type of orientation offered, orientation leaders will have different roles (Pretty, 2004). The varied types of orientation programs require institutions to develop their own unique training sessions for OLs to work with new students. Training requirements vary but may include a semester-long course, training immediately after the spring semester, training during the summer for orientation programs that begin right before classes start, or any combination of these (Pierson & Timmerman, 2004, p. 18).

Most schools will design OL training according to the desired outcomes, but there are several components, which are typically consistent across university campuses (Pretty, 2004). A few of these components include: reviewing orientation goals and expectations, learning consistent ways to communicate information to new students and their families, helping OLs develop leadership skills, and help them learn more about the campus. In addition, it is important for leaders to understand the role orientation plays in higher education (Pretty, 2004). Since orientation programs are considered a vital and influential first point of contact for incoming college students, careful selection of candidates and subsequent training is necessary. Team building amongst the orientation leaders is another important component of training as well as understanding the value of supporting each other (Abraham, Nesbit, & Ward-Roof, 2003).

Essentially, after completing a well-designed training program, OLs should be able to answer questions confidently and feel comfortable with a variety of job duties such as leading participants to sessions and leading group discussions. In addition, job qualifications for OLs include dependability, flexibility, the ability to make good decisions, a willingness to help, plus

be articulate and possess effective communication skills (Pretty, 2004). Many times, orientation leaders will hone these skills through their participation in orientation and the orientation team benefits from these skill sets as OLs also tend to lead and facilitate key program sessions for staff, like student panels of frequently asked questions. In addition, since OLs are so highly visible during the course of the day, having a well-trained OL team capable of making swift complex judgements, which serves the community. The orientation team can also reflect the collective competence of the student body, which is important to the success of the orientation program and, ultimately, to the success of any college or university.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Student involvement in college has been studied extensively over the past several decades and research indicates that it is the most fundamental and most influential principle of human learning and college success (Astin, 1993). Overall, theory suggests students benefit when they become involved in activities outside the classroom. One way students can become involved on campus is through employment in a summer orientation program. While there is some literature on college orientation programs, most is dated and focuses on the participants of orientation, providing little knowledge on the student orientation leaders who help execute the orientation programs. Hunter (2006) argues that the most overlooked and underappreciated resource for improvement available to researchers and administrators are the actual students in education communities. Campus officials often spend an exorbitant amount of time developing strategies and attempting to better processes without consulting their own students. Hunter suggests that students can provide valuable first-hand insight and can be highly effective partners in service improvements, which contribute to student retention. This study, therefore, focused on orientation leaders and seek their perspectives and rationales concerning their involvement in orientation.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to richly describe the details of the participants' experiences serving as orientation leaders and their perspectives on the impact of their involvement in leading orientation to learn more about orientation leader development and aspects of student identity after leaders participate in training and orientation implementation. Specifically, this study aimed to inform the discipline about the how student leaders are impacted and how they develop through the orientation leader process. It is anticipated that study results will inform faculty and college administrators concerning community building through engagement, be responsive to student's needs, and aid in the development of student leaders and the orientation program. **Research Questions**

1. How does participation in student leadership as an OL influence he/she college experience?
2. What does the experience of leading orientation suggest about what aspects of and how student identity are influenced?

## **Significance of the Study**

Related literature suggests students' investment in time and effort in college-involved activities lead to positive academic outcomes (Webber et al., 2013). The main outcome of the study was to capture information that higher education researchers, staff, and students can use to guide orientation leaders on the path to college success. Specifically, this study sought to provide insights into the impact of college student involvement in leadership roles on campus. Furthermore, this study sought to explore how students perceive the value of participation in leading orientation. Participant stories about their leadership experiences have the potential to teach staff and future leaders how these experiences may provide ways to

connect students with their university and, ultimately, help them become successful. Finally, lessons learned can be used to develop changes within leadership programs and help future generations of student leaders.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research framework for this qualitative study is Astin's theory on student involvement. Numerous researchers have studied college student involvement, and many of these studies have utilized the work of Astin's theory of involvement to ground their research. Astin (1984) describes student involvement as "the quantity and quality of physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience." In his theory, Astin outlines five different postulates, which include: student's investment of physical and psychological energy, continuum of involvement, quantitative and qualitative involvement, student investment, and practice influence. He also believed that involvement centers more on a student's behavior rather than the way they feel or think. In more recent literature, Ethington and Horn (2007) capitalized on Pace's (1980) argument that the effort students put forth in college involvement is the most important determinant of college student success. Student Success can be defined by students' persisting to graduation, academic achievement or understanding coursework and making good grades along with personal development. Hu and Kuh (2003) also claim this relationship between student involvement efforts and successful outcomes. The general concept endorsed by these theorists is that students will get more out of college if they invest more time and effort into their college related experiences. Webber et al., (2013) confirms most studies published demonstrate that investment and involvement in college activities produce a higher probability of academic success. Researchers state that what a student becomes involved with in college becomes the strongest predictor of successful college achievement



(Kuh, Kinzie, Shuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Therefore, Astin's theory of involvement will offer a view into how the participants in this study are able to gain strides in success by becoming involved and engaged in college leadership roles.

### **Overview of Research Design**

This dissertation study utilized a grounded theory approach focusing on the impact of the participants' involvement in serving as an orientation leader. The approach was selected because this is one of the methods of qualitative research, which allows for comparing collected units of data against one another until categories and concepts emerge. This study focused on exploring the participants' perspectives given during their interview; specifically, it examined student experiences, feelings, and perceptions related to their participation in leading orientation as described in their own words. Focusing on the orientation leaders' perspectives of their involvement contributed to understanding college student involvement and success.

Recorded interviews were used to gain student perspectives, utilizing open-ended questions and participant observation as the primary data collection strategies. A convenience sampling approach was also used to identify participants, until the saturation point was reached, who fit the following criteria: (a) undergraduate student, (b) currently attending the University of the Incarnate Word, and (c) either currently or previously employed as a summer orientation leader. According to Creswell (2003), grounded theory can incorporate a systematic approach and use of active codes to capture the experiences of participants. Therefore, after the interviews were collected, an exploration of specific themes and relationships within the developing framework was used. This research used the constant comparative approach for saturation, which involves comparing data with incident and incident with category. After the open coding, selective coding was used and an attempt to develop a theory was made. The analysis was

not limited to only coding interviews and data collection but also involved observation of the participants, including participants' body language, tone, and emphasis of voice, overall demeanor, and atmosphere of the setting.

Data saturation was an integral part of this inquiry. The aim of this study was to continually interview new participants until the data set was complete or when it indicated data redundancy. Once it became clear that the participants were describing similar experiences and no new insights or themes were obtained, the data categories were deemed well established. As Morse (1995) indicates, once the saturation of categories occurs, it suggests an end to the research (Bowen, 2008).

By richly describing the details of the individual participant experiences and thoroughly analyzing the data, this study was able to provide a deeper understanding of the summer orientation leaders' involvement in orientation and explore their individual experiences in more depth. I was also able to describe how these leaders' involvement in college impacted their college experience. This study focused on exploring and interpreting the meaning of participant experiences from their own point of view. Particularly, this research explored synthesized student leader experiences, feelings, and perceptions as described by their own words.

According to Creswell (2003), the underlying principle of convenience sampling is to select individuals who are willing and available to participate in a study. To identify participants for study, I sought students who have served as orientation leaders within the last 12 to 15 months, and made every effort to ensure the study adhered to the fundamental research ethics principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Mack, 2010).

Open-ended interviews helped to collect data during this study. The participants described their perspectives on their experiences during the time the participants lead summer

orientation. Brenner (2006) explains the goal of open-ended interviews is to understand the participants “on their own terms to find out how they made meaning in their own lives, experiences, and processes” (p. 357). Participants were interviewed at neutral locations on the college campus most convenient for them and the interviews were completed in-person, one-on-one, based on an interview guide containing open-ended interview questions. The interviews were documented through the use of audio recordings and field notes.

The data collection and analysis of this study followed Spradley’s (1979) developmental research sequence (DRS), which incorporates an ethnographic interview style. Ethnographic interviews emulate friendly conversation, and questions are designed to improve rapport with participants. This approach prevented an overly formal atmosphere, which can result in withdrawn cooperation (Spradley, 1979). In addition, according to Lee, Nargund-Joshi, and Dennis (2010), developmental research sequence was predominantly developed to “articulate cultural semantic knowledge shared by a community of participants” (p. 43). Another key purpose for selecting this methodology was to obtain knowledge about perceptions of study participants and to organize the emerged themes or findings into their personal system. The data meaning came from the participants’ points of view and not from the researcher, and participants described their reality in their own terms.

To evaluate this study, several methods were used to safeguard “quality in the qualitative research” (Hammersley, 2003). First, full transparency was used to allow anyone, from beginner to expert, the opportunity to judge the quality of the research. Next, strategies such as triangulation and audit trails were applied, since they ensure validity and reliability (Merriam, 2002). Lastly, trustworthiness in the data was established, as well as member

checks and use of rich, thick descriptions. These procedures were aimed at to ensure thoroughness and to comply with ethical guidelines.

### **Summary**

The research design aimed to highlight student voices, wherein various experiences aided OLs in their personal and leadership development. The study asked participants to share the stories of their experiences in leading orientation and any lessons they learned. The insights gained from the analysis of their narratives can be used to guide college students and provide institutions with useful insight for developing student programs. The study was guided by the theoretical framework of Alexander Astin's theory of involvement (1984) which posits the importance of involvement in college. I have organized the study into five chapters. Chapter one provides the introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, significance of the research, purpose, and research questions. The limitations of the study, significance, and summary conclude the first chapter. In chapter two, the literature review focuses on three main subject areas and significant theories related to the research. A description of the research design and methodology are presented in chapter three, and discusses data collected through the use of in-depth, open-ended interviews. Spradley's developmental research sequence (DRS) was used to develop a systematic and rigorous approach to the data collection and analysis process. DRS also allowed for an in-depth examination of the selected domains within the situations discovered in this study.

## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

The lack of literature on orientation leader experiences has encouraged the author of this dissertation to explore the perceptions of these student leaders, so as to develop a better understanding of their role and also to explore methods to improve the program. The following review of the literature focused on three areas related to student success in higher education. The sources selected center around student involvement and engagement, orientation programs, and student leadership as major factors in students' collegiate experiences. This research looked specifically for terms such as "student engagement", "student leadership development", "college success", and a variety of orientation programs. The goal was to filter the relevant data available in academic databases. These databases included Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Sage Research Methods. Equal query terms were used for each of the databases. A review of the literature will hopefully lead to a better understanding of the experiences of these students in leading orientation. Consequently, the focus was on a review of that portion of the literature, which presents theories that impact student involvement. Little to no research was available specifically regarding OLs and a general overview of the studies on the topic of student orientation is provided instead. The following section of this review explores the literature on student leadership and the fruits of collegiate experience. Finally, an overview of the literature on orientation programs will be presented.

### **Foundations of Student Engagement**

Pace (1987), an expert in the field of student engagement, has focused much of his research on the college students' quality of effort. He postulates that the quality of a student's time and energy spent being involved is more important than their demographic background. In addition, Pace's quality of effort theory similarly suggests that a student's time and effort

investment in academic endeavors will positively affect his/her learning and development. He believes the amount of effort a student invests into a task is more significant to academic outcome (Ethington & Horn, 2007). Hu and Kuh (2003) also support this connection between student effort and outcomes. They argue that the more the student engages in educationally purposeful activities, the greater will be his/her reported gains.

Alexander Astin, another leading scholar on the studies and outcomes of student involvement in university/college communities, introduced a well-grounded theory which also supports Pace's claims. He argues that the more time a student spent being involved in college-related activities; the more likely he or she will ultimately succeed. In 1993, he expanded on his assertion by defining student involvement as any action outside the classroom, which helps to develop and contribute to student learning. Webber et al., (2013, p. 518) describes Astin's involvement theory (1984) as "the amount of physical and psychological commitment that a student devotes to the academic experience." In other words, a highly involved student puts effort into studying, spends time on campus, participates in student life, and interacts with faculty and peers (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) argues that these actions keep students engaged on campus and will help contribute to student success in college. Kuh et al. (2005) confirm even more to the assertion that the time and energy college students invest in educationally purposeful activities is the strongest indication of their learning and personal development. While Pace's effort focuses more on how fully the student delves into college-related activities, Astin focuses more on the amount of time a student spends on these activities.

Student involvement on campus also leads to more interaction with faculty, which contributes to student success. Students who regularly interact with faculty are more likely than other students to have positive experiences across all areas of their collegiate venture (Astin,

1984). Specifically, student and faculty interaction is connected to positive academic outcomes such as making better grades and completing college degree requirements (Astin, 1993). Peer relationships fostered by co-curricular involvement help develop a student's social integration and relational bonds with the institution (Bean, 1980; Tinto, 1975), thus increasing the likelihood of an enjoyable college experience and successful degree completion.

The general finding is that both time and effort significantly contribute to positive student outcomes. Webber et al., (2013) support the majority of studies so far published, and they also believe that investment and involvement in college activities positively impacts upon student outcomes. Understanding and reviewing many of the positive outcomes related to student involvement and engagement is important because it helps students and institutions reach their intended goals of graduation and retention. I will proceed now to outline these goals into academic and co-curricular activities.

### **Academic Activities**

While analyzing a large sample of data from the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE), Kuh et al. (2008) found that students who engage in educationally purposeful activities (i.e. study time, interaction with faculty and use of library resources) also experience positive academic outcomes, including better grades and strong attachment to the college from their freshmen to sophomore years. This longitudinal study included data from 18 colleges and universities, which looked at data from 6,193 students and looked at information regarding student behaviors and activities that foster student engagement. Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, and Towler (2005) built on the 2008 NSSE study and take a more in-depth look at student engagement, specifically in college coursework. By reviewing Student Course Engagement Questionnaire responses, they found that engagement also has an impact on students' intrinsic

motivation or provides some sort of internal reward for the student which is directed toward learning. This information is important because it helps faculty and administrators develop an understanding of how students can be successful in college.

Other studies show the benefits of student engagement beyond the outcome of better college grades. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) suggest that active and collaborative learning techniques employed by faculty greatly improve the students' perceived levels of learning and engagement in the classroom and beyond. In addition, when faculty engage on a one-on-one with students both in and out of the classroom, students achieved greater personal and social development and increase their overall education (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). According to the same authors, when faculty have a teaching philosophy focused on best practices, academic challenge, and collaborative learning techniques, students will continue to report improvement. Moreover, when the faculty stresses co-curricular involvement, the students' level of engagement is much higher. Their research also emphasizes the importance of faculty attitudes and behavior. Not surprisingly, Umbach and Wawrzynski conclude that, in the end, faculty members probably play the one most important role in student learning. Because faculty play a role at orientation by leading sessions, engaging with students at lunch, assisting with advising and scheduling of classes their contributions can become important to OLs.

### **Co-curricular Activities**

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) confirmed the significance to living on campus as “the single most consistent within college determinant of the impact of college” (p. 611). Pascarella and Terenzini (1994) further explain that residence halls offer a social-psychological environment which is “qualitatively different” from off-campus and go on to assert that “living on campus will maximize opportunities for social, cultural, and extracurricular involvement, and



this increased involvement will account for residential living's impact on various indices of student development" (p. 25). Students residing on-campus experience their university in a more in-depth and connected way due to proximity and potential for immersion. Another study by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) notes that living on campus and participating in living-learning communities afford students more opportunities for social interaction. Living-learning communities can develop according to the specifically desired outcomes of the university. They typically include groups of students who live together in a residential hall centered on a shared situation such as having similar majors. These authors suggest that these types of programs help facilitate personal growth and support intellectual development. Pascarella and Terenzini's research synthesizing research from over 2,000 studies describe how students are impacted by attending college. In their study, they discovered that positive relationships start developing between student participation in learning communities and academic satisfaction. While Inman and Pascarella (1998) found no substantial difference in critical thinking scores between on-campus and off-campus students, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) affirm that most of the information on college students who reside on campus, increase their probability of graduating, much more so than that of commuter students.

Service learning also influence student involvement in co-curricular activities on campus. Service-learning projects positively contribute to the students' cognitive development. In addition, students will more easily understand their course subject matter when they participate in service-learning projects connected to that course work (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Service learning can be defined as a service experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what he/she she is learning by participating in the experience (National Society for Experiential Education, 1994). Participation in these types of

activities allows students to experience a sense of personal effectiveness while increasing awareness of the world (Astin & Sax, 1998). The studies of Pascarella and Terenzini and of Webber et al., (2013) also indicate that important benefits derive from service- learning and community service initiatives and these benefits translate into satisfaction and perceived cognitive and psychosocial gains for the students.

### **Student Leadership**

Exploring the ways in which students become involved and experience leadership opportunities may offer insight into student leadership development. In a study on the impact of out-of-class experiences on social and emotional growth, Kuh et al. (2005) surveyed 149 students from 12 universities and concluded that their “out-of-class experiences have the potential to contribute to valued outcomes of college” (p. 145). Kuh et al. mention that general student involvement in extracurricular activities yields many benefits, but highlights leadership roles as being especially valuable. For example, leadership experiences such as peer mentoring or officer roles in organizations, accounted for nearly one-quarter of all gains reported by the senior students involved in this study. In addition to student involvement, Kuh et al. argue that student leadership is important to the development of critical thinking skills because it leads to satisfaction with their university and academic success among enrolled students.

According to Northouse (1995), leadership is a process whereby an individual encourages a group to accomplish a shared goal. During the orientation leader training session, OLs learn the importance of making sure incoming students are happy and satisfied with their experience at the university and there is also a strong effort made to incoming new students and their families to feel welcomed and a part of their new community. In addition, they learn about the history, values, and traditions of the university. These efforts are adopted and encouraged to help build

community within the institution and, because these lessons are taught by OLs to incoming students, the OLs' new student relationship begins to form. Peer relationships become a fundamental feature of leadership in the student's collegiate experience, and the practice in leading one's peers is valuable in many ways (Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students who engage in these activities gain additional confidence in their interactions with others and develop diplomatic confrontation skills (Astin, 1993).

Moreover, Astin (1993) notes how participation in peer-led clubs and organizations impacts upon the students. He found that students elected to leadership positions, such as student officers, had better-developed public speaking and interpersonal skills. These findings are statistically significant depending on how many hours per week these students spend participating in collegial clubs and organizations. The greater the interaction within the peer groups, the greater the influence on their own student development. Astin remarks that the power of the peer group translates into the ability of those peers to engage each other on a deeper level with their experiences. Interactions with peers also contributes to the students' growth in interpersonal competence, cognitive complexity, and humanitarianism (Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1996). Intramural athletic teams, residence life work, and peer mentor programs are good examples of student organization activities, and each provide college students with opportunities to assume student leadership roles where they interact regularly with their peer groups.

Grandzol, Perlis, and Draina (2010) conducted a qualitative study of leadership outcomes among team captains and student-athletes engaged in the NCAA Division III Intercollegiate Athletics at six private universities. They found that just joining an athletic club greatly enhanced the development of their leadership; that becoming a team captain created a great opportunity to

learn and practice leadership skills (Grandzol et al., 2010). Their study results suggest that holding a leadership position on a team is instrumental in the development of leadership. Studies made on student mentor programs show that student leaders benefit from supporting other students and establishing campus connections, outcomes which otherwise may not have taken place. Because of this, many students see the process of helping others as a way to help themselves in the best way. Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt, (2000) also found determined, after 4 years of college, students involved in these types of leadership activities, compared to students who did not participate, show an increased understanding of leadership theories and are better prepared to promote leadership within their peer groups. These students also develop a deeper sense of civic responsibility. This helps to enhance their decision-making skills, which enables them to deal more clearly with complex issues (Cress et al., 2000).

The literature, then, provides evidence that students develop leadership skills during college and that involvement in campus leadership roles has a positive impact on them (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Leadership opportunities on college campuses offer valuable learning experiences for students and the literature on higher education leadership suggests, to some degree, this occurs throughout the college experience (Astin, 1993; Astin & Cress, 2004; Kuh & Hu, 2001). Studying the benefits and challenges that student leaders experience within these fields may predict the potential benefits and challenges encountered by the OLs in student orientation programs.

### **Orientation Programs**

Over the years, institutions have developed “college orientation programs to sum up the values of their university by introducing new students to the academic culture, traditions, history, faculty and staff, and surrounding communities (Mack, 2010). Mullendore and Banahan (2005)

note that orientation is specifically designed to assist incoming students with their transition to college and to enhance their success by helping them feel comfortable in their new environment. That is because orientation programs normally introduce academic advising, registration, placement testing, and campus resources available to the new students. Themes emphasized at orientation include academic integrity, personal responsibility, and community connectedness. In addition, there are usually sessions on residence life, campus safety, or commuting to campus versus residing on campus. More recently, orientation programs have evolved to provide students with information encompassing all aspects of student life: social, physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual. Universities may also set aside time for resource and organization-browse fairs, which can inform students on how to become an active member of their new community. Finally, there is usually time allocated to housekeeping issues such as obtaining a student I.D., submitting missing paperwork (i.e., high school transcripts and health records), or opening a campus bank account. The goal of most programs is to have new students leave orientation fully prepared to begin the academic year.

While orientation programs traditionally introduce incoming students to their university, provide them with resources to navigate their new lives as students and strongly influence their college expectations, they also offer the opportunities for existing students to become involved on campus (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). Freshmen attending orientation often engage with the student OLs. The various responsibilities of the OLs include helping students make a successful transition to their new university by communicating and modeling institutional expectations, exemplifying the campus culture, and building community with incoming students. Their ability to meet expectations not only paves the way for new student success, but also helps the OL's develop skills, which will benefit them in the future.

Considering their commitment to ensure a successful start to collegial experience, colleges and universities should choose to design orientation programs that also benefit the development of their OLs (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Orientation programs can be created not only assist incoming students, but also those students leading the initiatives. Designing and promoting leadership training outcomes may help shape students into successful individuals as a result of their contributions as OLs. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research into the impact of acting as an OL while welcoming new students to their college career (Wawrzynski & Pizzolato, 2006). Likewise, there is very little literature detailing the history of the OLs as they carry out orientation programs.

While the purpose of orientation is to help ensure a successful transition into university life for incoming students, there is still little focus placed on the students assisting with orientation programs. Student OLs are delegates of the university and exercise a potentially large influence upon the success of those with whom they interrelate. Their impact is especially strong upon incoming freshmen when they conduct orientation activities in a positive, enthusiastic, and professional manner.

In summary as discussed in this chapter about the literature on this topic: A brief review of Astin's student involvement theory (1993) and the benefits of being involved in student activities and student leadership programs clearly indicate their value. Whether students live on campus or become involved in activities related to campus clubs, sports, or service projects, those who invest more time and effort into campus activities will gain more from their college experience (Webber et al., 2013).

While the literature demonstrates that participation in campus activities is beneficial to the student, it also adds that interaction within the peer groups has a greater influence upon the

student. In addition, serving in a peer-leadership role or as a team captain within the peer group provides a rich opportunity for students to further develop their success and connection with the institution. Overall, students who benefit from becoming involved in their college campuses extend the skills learned in leadership positions beyond their college years and into their workplace. In addition, Astin's evaluation of many studies (1993) led him to conclude that students who participated in some form of student activity outside the classroom were more likely to succeed academically.

What the literature does not reveal, is the role of the OLs and the perception of their experiences while serving as leaders. To address this gap in the literature, the proposed research will pose the following questions:

1. How does participation in student leadership as an OL influence their college experience?
2. What does the experience of orientation leadership suggest about what aspects of and how student identity are influenced?

Studying the perspectives of the OLs regarding their involvement in leading orientation will provide a point of reference for higher education professionals to better develop orientation programs. The proposed study will utilize a qualitative research design. This approach – suggested by Marshall & Rossman has been selected because it can effectively capture the perspectives of the OLs' personal experiences.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The purpose of this research was to build a conceptual understanding of how involvement in leading orientation impacts student leaders. More specifically, my focus was to gain a better understanding of the OLs' individual experiences and their perspectives on how their involvement impacted them. Consequently, this research followed a qualitative design in the hopes of capturing these detailed descriptions from their perspectives. The need for qualitative research arises when the main objective is to deliver an in-depth understanding of the world by studying an individual's perspectives and experiences (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Qualitative research offers several different inquiry approaches. The model followed for this study is that of grounded theory design, which is a methodology used in qualitative research to help build and construct a theory, analyzes data obtained from the phenomenon studied. After a comprehensive review of the literature, I chose to use the grounded theory approach for my research because it was difficult to find information such as models, theories or frameworks relevant to my study. Since I chose to study individuals who have experience in the interaction of leading orientation, the systematic approach of using grounded theory procedures helped to provide an explanation of this process. This approach was also selected to be able to describe, explain, and make predictions regarding this phenomenon. In the absence of any existing framework or model, I elected to build this type of activity or concept based on the participants' testimonial. One of my goals in using grounded theory was to provide and contribute something which can be useful not only for the institution studied but also for realms of leadership. Since grounded theory is an inductive approach to the study of a concept, in this case, orientation leaders and their



perceptions of their involvement in the program, I used a comparative analysis approach in which to discover emerging patterns from the data to develop a theory.

I focused my search of the literature on databases such as Professional Development Collection, Education Resources Information Center, and ProQuest Education Database using keywords including, orientation leaders, student leader involvement in higher education, student engagement, student development, student success and orientation in college. At first, I attempted searching literature produced within a 10 to 12-year time frame that was most relevant to my intended keywords. Although some inquiries produced information on student leadership in college and student involvement, much of the literature was dated and difficult to relate back to this study. As a result of looking at the literature ranging from 2005-2017 and finding little relevant information to guide my study, I elected to make use of the grounded theory approach to qualitative research to help me discover more about this particular phenomenon. When using ground theory, the data collected from the research helps to build a theory. In addition, I hope to provide insight into my research questions and synthesize the student leader experiences, feelings, and perceptions as described in their own words. From this research, I also intend to extract meaning and understanding from their personal accounts and their unique interpretations of their experiences.

### **Protection of Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations**

Since ethical issues can arise in any type of research, it is imperative to consider the protection of all participants. To ensure the rights of participants, the Institutional Review Board granted permission to conduct this study. In addition, the purpose and objectives of this study were explained to each participant. Creswell (2011) instructs researchers to understand the ethical issues that involve both the participants and the gatekeepers so that both parties

understand the impact of the research. Participants must always be treated with respect and dignity and made aware that information collected during the interview would be retained as either anonymous or confidential protected material. Prior to the interview process, participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and that confidentiality would be maintained using pseudonyms in the data collection and reporting. I also made clear to each participant that only the person collecting and analyzing the interview information would be the researcher.

The selected participants were protected through adherence to the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board of the University of the Incarnate Word, and the research intentions were thoroughly explained prior to the signing and collecting of consent forms.

### **Identifying Participants**

This section provides detailed descriptions on how I selected the participants for this study, how I gained access to them, and identifies the research locations used in this study. To select eligible participants, I initially planned to use a sample of convenience to identify participants, who at the time of this study, fit the following minimum criteria: (a) students currently enrolled at the University of the Incarnate Word as undergraduate students; and (b) employed as a 2017 summer OL. Creswell (2003) notes that convenience sampling is a procedure in which the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied and consequentially the researcher cannot typically say the selected participants are representative of the actual population being studied. However, I also incorporated the use of stratified sampling of the convenience population identified. In which, for the purposes of this study, I identified specific characteristics such as male and female OLs and also experienced and

novice OLs to study. I believed this to be the best way to capture the most accurate representation of the 2017 OL cohort.

After approval from the IRB was granted, identification of possible participants for this project was allowed to proceed forward. I met with the Director of the First-Year Engagement Program and personal associates to compile a list of OLs who worked during the 2017 summer program. Some of these participants were already known to me through my involvement with the orientation program and First Year Engagement Office. Although, I knew some of them, at the time of these interviews, I did not know the participants as well as I have come to know them over time. Since it was unlikely this study posed any significant risk to participants, and because the identity of orientation leaders is public (institutional) information, it was possible to contact potential participants directly concerning their interest and willingness to participate in my research study. While I initially planned to use convenience sampling to select the participants because I knew some of the 2017 OL cohort, I also incorporated rough stratification to select a diverse group of participants. Though this wasn't fully intentional, I was very much interested in capturing information from participants who could offer a wide range of experiences. For example, I wanted to hear from students who were both new to the leadership role as well as those who had served as OLs in different capacities. In addition, I thought it would be helpful to hear from and identify both male and female respondents, along with various majors. To identify possible participants for this research individuals who served as OLs in 2017 were contacted first by invitation e-mail.

### **Data Collection**

The initial contact was made first by e-mail to explain the purpose of study and to request student participation. Since sufficient positive responses were received within one week, no

additional e-mail invitation was needed. If a potential participant had declined to participate in the study, he or she would no longer receive solicitation to participate and the next potential participant would have been sought out. Individuals interested in participating in this study received copies of the formal consent form and decided the times for their face-to-face interviews. The goal of interviewing was to gather information about what people think and what they have experienced (Hammersley, 2003). The e-mail sent to them made it clear that they should understand the purpose of the study and that their participation was voluntary and their identities would be protected. It was also necessary to explain who would have access to the data and how I would keep the information obtained safeguarded. I scheduled interviews on dates and in locations most convenient to each participant, that is, in neutral spaces like the study rooms of the University's Library. Furthermore, I reviewed the consent forms prior to the beginning of each interview. If the student understood and consented to participate in the study, he or she signed the consent and they would keep a copy of the signed form. I did not collect data prior to this process.

I sent an invitation e-mail to five students first, three new members of the team, one male and two female, and two members of the team who had served for 3 years. I chose to send the invitation to only five students at the beginning. I didn't know how much data or how many participants I would need to reach my criteria for data collection (saturation) but I did recognize the possibility of interviewing additional students (five, 10 or even 20 students may be necessary to reach saturation). Thus, I started with a small group to collect information to assess the need for additional subjects and also in an effort to make data collection manageable and stay organized with their responses. Most of my respondents appeared to be eager to participate in my study. They would express interest in my study by asking questions about it, engaging in casual

conversation about their OL friends and personal related topics. They also demonstrated an eagerness to participate by arriving early to their interview appointment time. It appeared as though they took a genuine interest in providing information to be studied. Because I worked with these individuals for many hours throughout the summer, I developed a modest rapport with these students and because they demonstrated a comfortableness in their communication with me, I assumed they would all be interested in participating with the study. To structure the data collection, it was important to me as the researcher to adhere to a well-managed interview schedule. As a result, I was careful not to overload my interview schedule because of the possibility that I might need to go back and revisit or re-interview someone. As I collected more information from additional respondents, I also remained aware that I might need to ask everyone an additional set of questions. My attempt was to remain vigilant to the research process and not get too far ahead of my information, or the data I was collecting. I tried to keep my focus on why I was pursuing my research in this way keeping in mind that I aimed to improve and demonstrate the rigor of the information developing in the data. Essentially, I was seeking a way to safeguard the process of the research and to ensure the quality of the data. In doing so, I was looking for saturation without any kind of framework determined, or a hypothesized priority. I wanted to be careful in the data collection phase to ensure I allowed for the opportunity to go back and re-interview or to go back and perform member checking as necessary. All students who received this initial invitation to participate in the study, offered to participate. Once I completed the first two interviews, I began to see an immediate overlap of information and some cohesion and similarity of perspective being provided by the participants and felt comfortable enough to invite the next study participants into the study one by one until saturation of the content was reached. I chose to send the invitation to another veteran female,

one veteran male and one new female. I felt that this was the best way to gain an accurate representation of the OL cohort. I conducted a review of potential participants based on meeting the criteria and ultimately that determined the pool of 30 potential participants to work from. Had a potential participant declined to participate in the study, the next potential participant from the pool would have been sent the invitation e-mail to participate in the research study. Participants who accepted the invitation received an e-mail or further elaboration and clarification in person regarding the research process. In addition, I asked them to decide convenient times and locations for face-to-face interviews and interviews were scheduled on dates and at locations most convenient for the participants. I gave participants copies of the formal consent form at the time of their scheduled interview.

Prior research has indicated that age, culture, appearance, and social class are all factors which influence the connection between the researcher and the participants (e.g. Hewitt, 2007). This study, in an effort to maintain and/or establish rapport with the participants, made use of my experience working in higher education and with college students. By establishing some form of camaraderie, even if minimal, I believe helped to minimize the barriers associated with formal research methods and helped gain the trust needed for authentic and rich descriptions of the participants' experiences.

According to Creswell's (2013) concept of qualitative research, the researcher himself/herself is the most common instrument used to gather data for interviewing and behavior observation of participants. The researcher asks broad general questions of the participants to gain their view of their particular experience. The description of their perspectives then becomes the data to analyze and determine meaning from. In this study, I attempted to collect the perspective of the participant concerning his/her experience so that I could make meaning,

discern patterns, recognize key variables or elements, look for relationships, or find rules which may prove to be useful to the field of education. While there was a framework in place, based off the responses I would gain from participants, because I am the instrument for this study, I was able to modify or tailor the question to the individual respondent in the interview. This allowed me to clarify and seek elaboration from their responses and it also allowed me to discern the saturation for discontinuing my research. As a result of this iterative process, every subsequent interview became informed by the previous interview. This meant that the direction of my interview questions became influenced by any prior knowledge or bias I gained. For example, in the first participant's interview I had no reference point to guide my questions but in the second, third and following interviews, I was able to bring prior knowledge of how a respondent might answer a particular question and tailor it accordingly. In effect, I, as the instrument, became more refined from my experience with the preceding interviews which brought more clarity and insight to the later interviews. In addition, I also took descriptive field notes as a method of recording the observations of participants. Field notes were a way of documenting what happened during each interview.

The primary data-collection method was face-to-face, recorded interviews. I used an audio device to record the conversations with participants. As suggested by Marshall & Rossman (2011), I wanted to describe the meanings behind the experiences of the participants' in their own words. The participants personal perspectives of their involvement in leading orientation was sought so as to describe their experiences as well as their reflections and realizations of themselves after their participation as leaders. In this study, I conducted one formal interview lasting approximately one hour in length with each participant which I collected over a period of 3 months. I used open-ended interviews questions to allow for flexibility in each of the

participants' responses and to encourage a conversational flow of dialogue during the interviews. I also used in-depth interviews to describe and explain the collective educational experiences of each participant. Since each OL described their own experience, according to Brenner (2006), it is proficient to observe the use of open-ended interviews. This process allowed participants to explain how they make meaning of their thoughts, lives, and experiences.

Creswell (2003), asserts that qualitative data gathering involves "collecting data using forms with general questions to permit the participant to generate responses; gathering word (text) or image (picture) data; and collecting information from a small number of individuals or sites" (pp. 202-203). In addition, in-depth interviews can be conducted when a small number of respondents are interviewed to explore their individual perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce, 2006). These were beneficial for my study because I collected detailed information about the thoughts and behaviors of the OLs' experiences leading orientation.

### **Interview Locations**

According to Lichtman (2013), the setting for interviews should be quiet and private. In addition, Lichtman suggests that participants should feel that their responses are valued and therefore, careful consideration to appropriate interview locations was given. Therefore, I asked the participants what their choice of interview space would be ahead of the interview by offering an office meeting space, conference room or study room. Most participants did not have a preferred preference of location but some felt most comfortable in a space, which was familiar to them and also close to their next class or meeting. I arranged for the meeting space ahead of the scheduled interview to minimize any interruptions. However, I conducted all interviews for this



study at locations most convenient and comfortable for each participant. This allowed the data collected to include thick, rich descriptions.

Once the participant arrived at the interview location, I explained the interview process; the length of time the interview could take and asked if they needed any clarification of the process before we began. I also, asked permission to record the interviews and explained that I would be the only person with access to the recording and eventual transcription. I used one central question to open the dialogue exchange of each of the interviews. Essentially, this provided the opportunity for participants to apply parameters to their responses, giving them a general reference point to begin offering their replies. I wanted to allow them to speak freely regarding their experiences but for the purposes of this research, I also wanted to contain their responses to the subject of this study. For example, I wanted to know about their perceptions of OL training, I would ask them to think back to the time they walked into the training classroom and explain what they saw, felt or experienced. This explains how I guided them to offer particular responses I wanted to better understand. I also referenced an interview guide (see appendix B) during the dialogue exchange with participants to remain cognizant of the research questions I was attempting to answer in this study. I developed this guide in advance of the first interview and used continuously until the last interview took place. These pre-established questions were used as a conversation starter if necessary and also a guide for the interview. Even though I used a semi-structured interview format, flexibility and adaptability were utilized within the interview structure, especially if the participant chose to discuss topics outside the range of the interview questions. If a participant elected to deviate from a certain question, the natural flow of his/her response to the question was not interrupted and I would guide the

respondent through their recollection of their experiences such that they eventually informed my research question.

Since making the participant feel comfortable during his or her interview was essential, I asked each participant for permission to use a digital audio recorder. I also took notes to document the details of each interview. Note taking was influenced by observing the body language of the interviewee, field notes during the actual interview were kept at a minimum. Once the interview was complete, I documented more specific notes to synthesize my observations and summarize the main points of the interview discussion. Once I completed the interview, more specific notes were taken to synthesize this researcher's observations and summarize the main points of the conversation.

The central goal of this research was to better understand the lived experiences of the OLs. It was hoped that, as a result, a deeper insight into what each participant thought, gained, and learned from his/her involvement in the program could be obtained. In addition, I also hoped to aggregate the information I was interested in from both individual and collective collected experience. Likewise, this research hoped to explore opportunities for improvement of the program and for greater understanding of how school administrators can enrich the lives of future OL participants.

Data saturation was also an integral part of my inquiry. For the purposes of this study, I defined data saturation as the continuous collection of data until consistency developed in the participants' responses. I continuously asked questions of the participants involved in study until my data set showed signs of redundancy. Once no new insights emerged from the data and no new themes were identified from participants, I deemed my data categories to be well

established. As Morse (1995) indicates, once the saturation of categories occurs, it suggests an end to the research (Bowen, 2008).

By fully describing the details of the individual participant's experiences and by analyzing the data, it was hoped that an understanding of the expectations of the OLs' involvement in summer orientation developed. The analysis of how leading orientation impacted the OLs followed. The primary focus of this research was to gain insight into the meaning of the participants' experiences from their own point of view. I also sought to explore and synthesize their experiences, feelings, and perceptions as described by their own words.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

I selected a grounded theory design for this study to examine individuals who experienced leading orientation and as a way of exploring that experience. It was my intent to generate a tentative explanation of the phenomenon which was taking place. I also selected the grounded theory design method to attempt to build a theory regarding this phenomenon and because I could relate it back to answer my research questions. Once I identified the participants, interview data were collected from them and then analyzed to develop the theory. Although an interview guide was used during the interviews, I paid special attention to determine whether there was a need to revise or add additional questions to ensure the original research goals were met. In addition, I documented patterns and themes which surfaced from the collected data during the transcribing process.

Creswell (2003) notes that a grounded theory can incorporate a systematic approach and the use of active codes to capture the experiences of participants. The use of open coding followed by axial coding, then selective coding, and my theory began to unfold. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, pp. 28-52) open coding involves the "process of breaking down,

examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61). They go on to define axial coding as “procedures which make connection between categories involving conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences” (p. 96). And lastly, selective coding involves, “relating the core strategy to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 116). It was important to start data analysis while the interview was under way. Furthermore, using the interviews, I aimed to provide thick descriptions of the experiences of the participants. Thus, after identifying themes, I explored how those themes and relationships would fit within the developing framework.

When transcribing the interviews, I sought out patterns or codes that begin to emerge from the participants’ interviews into phrases or short sentences (open coding). I then grouped into categories (axial coding) in an effort to aggregate the data for a more in-depth analysis. The idea was to investigate consistent comments and perspectives that would fit into one specific category. To organize the codes, if repeated patterns occurred among several participants, the patterns and codes were categorized as overarching core categories which helped to allow for an organization of the data that could then influence or contribute to a deeper understanding.

Categories developed from the relating codes found in the interview data which helped to compose a grounded explanation of the data (selective coding). Although each participant had their own description of his/her own lived experience, I categorized all data in a methodical and structured way to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of all collected data.

Constant use of the comparative approach for saturation, which involved comparing data with incident and incident with category, was also employed. The constant comparative is an inductive data analysis procedure which takes specific data and broadens it more comprehensive

categories. It is an analysis procedure used to ground the categories in the data. Using this method allowed me to determine, develop and code the data into my three main themes.

The analysis was not limited to coding interviews and data collection also involved observation describing the participants' body language, overall demeanor, and the atmosphere of the setting. Richly-described details of the individual participant's experiences and analysis of the data helped to provide a deeper understanding of the summer OLs' involvement in orientation and more in-depth insight into their experiences with leadership. For example, one of the OL respondents described their experience as positive overall and goes into more detail with how she believed the experience benefited her. She mentioned the experience helped her become a better communicator because she interacted heavily with parents at orientation. She thought this interaction would become helpful to her when going on law school interviews. Using expressive hand gestures and over emphasizing her words, she described how she initially was afraid to apply for the OL position because she was shy. She explained that she was an only child and came from a small family but she believed because she spoke with adults at orientation, she had become more comfortable answering questions from mature people. These details also helped to describe how becoming involved with orientation impacted these leaders' college experience.

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) devised the concept of "trustworthiness" and developed it to evaluate the (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability of qualitative research. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data reported in this study, I employed the use of member checks. This allowed the participants the opportunity to review the transcriptions of the data collected from their transcribed interviews. I also created observational

field notes to help document the non-verbal behavior of participants during the interview process. By doing this, I was able to discover deeper meaning of each participants' answers in more specific context when reading the given responses. In my notes, I chose to describe the meeting location of each individual interview such as the type of office setting and the details of the setting (whether it was inviting and welcoming or possibly sterile and unwelcoming). I did this to capture a deeper sense of how the participant may have felt and interacted during their interview. The notes also included details such as what time the participant arrived for the meeting, if they appeared to be calm or open to the process or hurried and rushed. These procedures essentially offered another layer to the construction of how I discovered a deeper meaning as well as aimed to aid in the consistency of the data gained from participants' responses. The application of ethical practices was included in every aspect of this study as it is important to maintain integrity of the research and ensure the research represents a truthful position (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

In summary, the purpose of this study was to clearly describe participants' experiences while serving as OLs including their perspectives on their involvement in leading student orientation. In addition, through this study I sought to learn more about the OLs and aspects of student identity after leaders participate in training and orientation programming. Specifically, this study aims to inform the discipline about the dynamics that explain how student OLs were impacted through the orientation leader process. I hope that the results of this study will enable college faculty and administrators to gain a better understanding of how to build community through engagement, be responsive to student's needs to be successful, and to facilitate the development of student leaders and of the orientation program. I asked the OLs involved in leading summer orientation open-ended questions which served as the primary data collection

strategy for this study. The interviews with each participant lasted up to one hour and I transcribed the content and analyzed it looking for re-occurring themes. Trustworthiness of the data is a concern of all research and, for the purposes of this study, I incorporated the use of member checks by making the transcribed interviews available for inspection by the respondents. In addition, triangulation of data collection will help to uphold the qualitative paradigm standards (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Yin, 2011). I used the information obtained from these interviews to develop a better understanding of the lived experiences of the participants and provide insight into the best practices for student involvement initiatives. It has also provided insight into possible improvements that may need further examination so that future leaders can help improve the success of the program.

## **Chapter IV - Findings**

### **Researcher Context**

Selecting a dissertation topic was by far one of the major challenges I faced during the dissertation writing process. I considered many different ideas before I made a final decision, believed to facilitate the presentation of new and useful information. In addition, as with any researcher, I wanted to add to the body of knowledge while also enjoying the discoveries of my topic. As a “well-seasoned” student, I grew accustomed to receiving straightforward assignments and turning them in by their required due date. In my mind, the guidance from a handful of student-centered professors I had come to admire over the years would allow the process to be more manageable. Numerous times through my visits with them I was instructed to select a topic I was most passionate about. They would explain, once you have chosen a topic, it is difficult to invest the time and the energy to start over if your first choice did not develop into a workable product. I remember thinking, selecting a dissertation topic seemed like a daunting task, for it would partially represent my professional identity for the rest of my life. Perhaps I was making it a greater ordeal than it needed to be but, I remember feeling overwhelmed and, at times, I would mentally escape thinking about it and not revisit the thought for several weeks.

In the end, after placing a great deal of pressure upon myself to choose the best topic to sustain my research study, I decided to interview former professors from graduate school. They suggested a number of worthwhile topics for consideration. Their suggestions were all related to my interests, however, none felt quite right. I entertained some of their suggestions for a period of time, but could not come up with something truly satisfying.

Previously, I worked within a corporate environment and through the help of one of my professors, considered returning to the company to explore a topic focusing on succession



planning and interviewing CEOs or upper management. However, I also explored the possibility of looking into the life of college students. Since I had recently begun working in the field of higher education, I thought studying a specific student population would be a more representative topic of my interests. It would also give the opportunity to come to know the administrators who ordinarily encouraged research.

Once I finally decided on keeping my topic within the realm of higher education, I knew that observing the life of students would be inspirational because I enjoyed working with them on a daily basis. In addition, I was also hoping that such a study would bring some new insight into the already flooded research field of higher education. I decided to delve into the lives of undergraduate students since it had been stressed to me by school mentors that I should choose a population I could realistically access. Some of my colleagues chose what I considered rather exotic subjects, topics such as the parolee system or Sufism practitioners. Others chose to research the life of males persisting in their higher education journey or that of first-generation students. For a while, I long considered exploring some of their suggestions for further research, but none of those fields interested me. I was continuously instructed that it is best to decide on a topic which is near and dear to one's heart and something towards which one feels very passionate.

After much thought and consideration, I originally decided upon a subpopulation of undergraduate students who mentored incoming freshmen. These mentors were part of a newly formed organization and I thought I could help improve its effectiveness with further research. After several months of combing through the literature and finally becoming excited about defining a research topic, my supervisor asked me to sign a contract confirming I would not study the intended mentor program. Since this individual was one of the principal gatekeepers, I

decided to forgo my chosen topic and look for another population within the realm of higher education.

During this time, I lost motivation and elected to wait a while before looking into another research topic. I considered other areas in the field of education and discovered that the options were manifold. The issue was how to narrow them down. Meanwhile, I was saddled with additional job duties which imposed major demands on my time, and I was also assigned to a new dissertation advisor. I was also investing longer hours during at work because I loved my new job responsibilities which required working closely with a group of undergraduate student leaders. Nonetheless, I realized that work was pulling me away from my main objective of writing my dissertation. While focusing on work, I failed to see any connection with the dissertation objective. However, I developed a genuine passion for working with these students. I loved thinking about how working as a team, we would solve problems and accomplish established goals. Besides, the team was working together towards a common goal of providing a welcoming campus experience for incoming students. It was a strong team and the students appeared to feed off one another's energy. Working with this team offered a young and renewed approach to a stagnant environment. I then began to realize the need to delve into the story of these students.

Brimming with excitement and enthusiasm, I began working on my research, which also helped me gain momentum at work. I learned why institutions hold orientation, how schools shape their orientation programs, how they set up their assessment of the programs as well as best practices being utilized. This was all helpful information, but what about the student OLs? It was their work that was of most interest to me. Much of the information I collected through my research was useful, but my focus was on the students who assisted with and led the orientation.

Previously, orientation planning responsibilities had been delegated to several different offices, including the Admissions Department, the First Year Experience Office, and, in addition, the Office of Student Affairs. The planning required significant time and effort and, since most offices were not fully staffed, it became difficult to devote adequate time and resources to planning the program. It required the staff to work long hours during the summer months, a time when most offices were run by fewer employees because several of them were on vacation with their families. Nevertheless, I was so motivated by my topic that the thought of summer vacation didn't occur to me. I had now developed a real passion for seeing these student leaders succeed. I became close to many of them and shared the ups and the downs of their college experiences with them throughout their semesters of study. I found myself yearning to learn more about them and how their college experiences impacted upon their lives.

Now that I had settled on my research topic and loved it, I began wondering whether my love for orientation and for working with these students would cloud my judgement throughout the research process. Was I capable of providing an unbiased look into their lives? I wasn't entirely sure, but I knew I would strive to offer a unique insight into their lives. I thought I might bring a little prejudice into the research simply because I was associated with the program I loved. However, by focusing attention on the experiences of the OLs, I was hoping to uncover phenomena which could help future OLs. One way or another, I wanted to add my contribution, even if minimal.

When I initially began the research process, I knew the orientation team had a special group of leaders. Although several of the same students would return each summer to work with the program, there were always a good number of new OLs who added a renewed dynamic to the group. Several of the OLs were outgoing and natural conversationalists, but not all were

extroverts who would charm and work as effectively within the group. Yet, each OL had something valuable to contribute to the team and to the incoming students and their families by sharing their unique campus experience as college students.

While appreciating the contributions of the OLs and the value they brought to the incoming students, an important question came to mind: Aside from the monetary compensation from being employed as an OL, what else, other than their wages, were they gaining by serving as leaders? One of the things I was hoping to discover was how their work enlightened and improved their lives for participating in the program. If the OLs returned summer after summer and became fully involved in the program, was it solely for the monetary compensation or was it partially because of the experience? Was there a component of the program which they enjoyed enough to cause them return summer after summer? Some of the OLs seemed genuinely saddened when their summer job came to an end. What was it? Was it because the academic year was fast approaching and their free time was ending? I wanted to know more about whatever this phenomenon was. During the school year, some OLs talked about the next orientation season and sounded quite excited about it. For instance, they would ask, “What theme should we use next summer?” Or they suggested ideas they had for the next summer orientation. The excitement surrounding their participation in the program was there. Most of them appeared fully committed to the program and I wanted to find out why.

I expected the leaders’ commitment to orientation would benefit the incoming students. However, I was curious about how this process affected the OLs, if at all. Was it beneficial to them to be program leaders? Did their participation help them during the academic year because they had gained greater knowledge of the campus resources? Did they feel more connected to the university as a result of their participation in the orientation program? Were they able to view

faculty and administrators in a different light and perhaps develop a comfort level with them? By working so closely with staff during the summer, would they view administrators as more approachable? I was hopeful for any positive outcomes that could make their journey to graduation easier or more manageable. Keeping this in mind, I aimed to provide objective insights into their perspectives of leading orientation. Again, I thought there might be some room for prejudgment due to my closeness to their work, but my plan was to merely ask them about their experiences. I decided to focus my attention and study on the OLs who participated in the program during the most recent summer, that of 2017.

Although I interviewed students who were accessible, I remained aware of the importance of speaking with representatives of all kinds. Thus, I chose team members who were brand-new to the program in 2017 as well as those who had multiple years of experience with their participation in the program. I also chose leaders who were responsible for planning and executing different components of the program. In addition, I chose both male and female OLs, some of whom had extroverted personalities who would speak a great deal, and others who considered themselves to be shy and less talkative. In this manner, I hoped to present the best possible portrait of the 2017 OL group.

## **Introduction to Findings**

This chapter presents the findings which emerged in the narratives of students interviewed for this study. I chose the participants of my study because all met the criteria of serving as orientation leaders at a faith-based liberal arts institution in Texas. This particular group of students was selected to bring feasibility to the study but also add to the body of knowledge regarding students serving as leaders or recruitment agents for the university. The

research consisted of eight interviews conducted over a 3-month period. The narratives explain the participants' perceptions of their involvement in summer orientation.

I used a sample of convenience (Creswell, 2003) to identify participants until the saturation point was reached for students who fit the following criteria: (a) students currently enrolled at a faith-based, liberal arts institution in Texas; and (b) employed as a 2017 summer orientation leader. To identify participants for this study, I worked with the Associate Dean of the First Year Experience Program. Since I believed my study would pose little risk to participants and because identifying orientation leaders is public information, I did not foresee any issue with contacting the individuals for this information.

The pool of potential participants was compiled of the students who participated as orientation leaders during summer 2017. This gave me 30 possible contacts needed for the student interviews and provided some direction regarding who would be able and willing to participate. I also incorporated the use of stratified sampling of the convenience population identified. I incorporated this procedure to identify specific participant characteristics who would capture the most accurate representation of the 2017 OL cohort. For example, since the 2017 OL cohort experience level was varied, with some OLs bringing 3 years of experience to the group and others being new to the program, it was important to capture both sets of experiences for this study. It was also important to identify both the male and female perspectives to provide an authentic representation of the cohort. After the Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, the participants were contacted and interview appointments were scheduled through e-mail. To recruit possible participants for this research, I first contacted them by invitation e-mail to request and confirm their participation. Initially, I planned to follow up with the invitation requests through e-mail if I did not receive a response within one week. No additional follow-up

e-mail was necessary as all five participants responded to the initial request for participation. Some participants responded within the same day to the request to participate while others elected to ask additional questions and followed up within the week with a visit to my office which is located on campus. No one declined to participate in the study.

After securing the first five participants for the interviews, I coordinated interview times and locations for the study to begin. I did my best to schedule interviews on dates and in locations most convenient to the participant. Since all participants were students during the time of their interview and would be attending class on campus, all interviews took place in campus offices. I adhered to the participants' site of convenience and time availability to conduct the voice recorded interviews. In addition to forwarding a copy of the consent form to the participants, I provided an additional copy to them at the time of their interview.

I conducted participants' interviews for approximately one hour using open-ended interview questions. The interviews took place in different settings on the university campus but were held inside one of three offices. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them after each interview. In addition, I also took observation notes during and after each session so I could use them alongside the transcription for further analysis and clarification of the data. I collected a little over 9 hours of data and 32 pages of narrative data for interpretation from the participants. I then used the constant comparative analysis method to aggregate the data and derive codes, themes, and categories of the perceptions of the participants. Once I completed this for the first five participants, I invited additional participants into the study one at a time using stratification.

My first five participants interviewed consisted of two new members with no experience, one male and one female. In addition, of the remaining three individuals, one was female and had 3 years of experience and was a team leader, the male participant also had 3 years of

experience and was in a leadership role. The last member of the initial group of five had participated twice in previous years with summer orientation and was also in a leadership role.

The next student I invited to interview for this study was a female veteran member of the orientation leader group, she however, did not participate as a leader/manager. Following her interview, a male student with two years of experience participated in the interview for this study. He initially began the program as a regular team member but he was quickly promoted during the summer to a leadership role. Lastly, I invited a female member of the team into the study. She had no previous knowledge of the program and was new to the experience of serving as an orientation leader. I decided to invite these last three students to participate in my study and ultimately collected data from them to reach saturation. I go into more detail below about each individual participant from this study.

### **Demographic Profiles**

This research consisted of the perspectives of eight college students who served as orientation leaders. The participants were of varying ages, ethnicities, school classifications, majors, and experience levels. For anonymity purposes, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. I assigned their pseudonyms in the order the interviews took place to help me keep the data organized. The demographic profile of the participants, a brief narrative of each participant, and a description of the themes which emerge from the interviews follow.

### **Participants**

The first interviewee, was a junior, Computer Information Systems – Programming major. He had a welcoming and pleasant disposition which made it a comfortable first interview for me as the researcher and also the participant. He appeared to be nonchalant but spoke clearly and carefully articulated his words as if attempting to be on his best behavior or trying to be



helpful with the interview process. He seemed to become more relaxed and comfortable towards the middle and end of the interview. I drew this conclusion because when the interview began, he sat down in his chair with his shoulders back, his head positioned upright and possessed a good overall posture. By the end of the interview, he no longer possessed his upright posture and his sitting posture appeared more casual. He made good eye contact during most of the interview but would also glance down at his upside-down cell phone on the desk and casually motion with his fingers to describe his experiences. Participant A was from South Texas, lived with both parents at home and is the middle child of the three children in his household. His younger sister also attends a Catholic university but she chose to attend one of the other Catholic universities in the city. Participant A grew up close to the university he attends and selected the institution because it was a private school with small class sizes. Participant A is a commuter student who is a member of the fencing team, serves as a peer mentor to freshmen, and is a work-study for the Office of Financial Assistance. He considers himself to be well-liked on campus and mentioned having a large circle of friends. Participant A first discovered the orientation leader position when a professor mentioned the opportunity to him because he thought he would be a good fit and encouraged him to apply. Participant A first joined the orientation team for summer of 2017.

Impact in his own words: I learned some things about myself in that I am able to talk for hours on end and that I am able to maintain a high level of energy, I do what needs to get done. I've met so many fantastic new people through orientation that I talk to almost on a daily basis, we hang out all the time on and off campus.

I got a better understanding of myself and grew more confident as a leader because before I would be really nervous if someone asked me questions and I would kind of like get the jitters, but after going through leading orientation I was able to pick up on my jitters and take a breath and take a step back, and focus, like I do know this answer, and answer what needs to be answered. And even now, I'm good at presenting, because, I got to speak in large groups at orientation, so it definitely helped with my presentation skills, and in my public speaking class, and in my CIS classes.

**Participant B.** Participant B was in her senior year as a Nursing major, Psychology minor student at the university. She knew from a young age she was interested in studying Nursing and chose the university because of the nursing program reputation and its proximity to her hometown which was approximately a three-hour drive. Participant B began her interview in a shy, soft tone but as the interview developed and more questions were asked, she became more authoritative and assertive when she spoke about having a leadership role on the team. She demonstrated a more assertive tone in her voice by speaking more loudly and nodding her head during the interview as if to indicate she was confident in her responses to the questions. She lived on campus her freshmen and junior years and commuted from her off campus apartment during her sophomore and senior years. Participant B elected to acclimate to her new university environment for her freshman year and was not active on campus until her sophomore year when she joined the campus activities board and a member and eventually assumed a student leadership role as a Director of Administration. She also became an Orientation Leader and advanced to the student leadership position of Parent Orientation Director and in addition was a member of the Psy-Chi Psychology honor society. Participant B was the eldest of three children and grew up with both parents at home. She mentioned that her parents liked the university she chose because it was Catholic but they did not agree with her leaving her hometown for school. They would have preferred her to live at home and commute to the nursing school located closer in Houston. She described a strict upbringing with a heavy emphasis on family ties and support. She also mentioned that each time she would return home during the holiday breaks from school she would be lectured by her uncle who would ask why she chose a university in another city several hours from home and family. Participant B said she first heard of the orientation leader position through one of her friends, who had participated with the program as an orientation

leader the previous year, and mentioned that the experience would be good for her since she was shy and she would be paid for having fun. She also mentioned seeing an advertisement or flyer for the position openings and decided to apply in 2015.

Impact in her own words: Orientation helped me be able to speak more professionally and be tactful with answering questions from the parents. Plus, I was able to practice speaking in Spanish which I think will be helpful in my future jobs. And another big thing it helped me learn was how to work on a team and also lead the team. I didn't know I could do it but now that I did, I feel a little better about myself. And I feel like I learned the textbook side of college from all my classes but this helped me also learn how to talk to the people which I will need to do well in my future workplace.

**Participant C.** Participant C was also in his senior year during the 2017 program and he chose to double major in Psychology and Criminal Justice. He is the eldest of two siblings and the only male child. He commuted mostly from his mother's home a few miles away. He chose this institution because of its proximity to home and he liked the campus "environment". He was active with the cross-country track team and also worked with the grounds crew on campus for his freshmen and sophomore year. In addition, he held off campus work positions at fast food restaurants and retail stores. Participant C appeared to be very eager for his interview and arrived before the researcher to his interview dressed in professional attire. He was very confident and relaxed with his answers and did not appear to grow tired of speaking about his experiences; he also seemed to enjoy the interview process and to be able to contribute to the study. He spoke loudly and made eye contact throughout the interview and from his facial expressions (raising his eyebrows) appeared to emphasize his responses to each question asked. Participant C was first encouraged to apply to become an orientation leader by one of his friends on the cross-country team who had served as an orientation leader the previous year. Participant C enjoyed the summer position and rejoined the team each summer eventually advancing to the Lead

Orientation Leader position which required additional duties and hours above the other

Orientation Leaders.

Impact in his own words: Participating with Orientation was that one thing I looked forward to every summer because it felt important to be seen as a leader and I had experience with orientation so I liked being in that role. I think it helped me gain confidence not only for this job but for what I end up doing in the future.

**Participant D.** Participant D was a commuter student in her junior year who chose to major in Biology. She was involved with one other organization on campus which promoted community service during her participation with orientation. She arrived upbeat and enthusiastic for her interview and she was open and willing to speak candidly about her experiences as an orientation leader. She is the eldest of three siblings and has two younger sisters all of which live at home with their parents. Participant D although close in age to the other orientation leaders, was proposed to and married during the summer she participated in orientation. When describing how she chose her college, she mentioned making several visits to the college while she was playing sports in high school. She remembered admiring the campus and the overall atmosphere. Participant D had shorter answers than the other students interviewed up to this point. She also was much more expressive with her hand gestures and eye movement. She also shrugged her shoulders throughout the interview as if to indicate uncertainty. She first heard about the orientation leader position through a recruitment table located on campus during the spring semester. She remembers the student leaders recruiting for the position being excited about the position and she wanted to try a new experience.

Impact in her own words: I think getting involved with orientation was good for me because it helped me get out of my shell and try to fit in here. And I'm the type of student that's more focused on my coursework so I didn't join much my freshman and sophomore year but I wanted a summer job and so I applied for it because the students that told me about it made it seem fun. So I think it was a good choice for me to help me get involved. I mean it did get me my [campus] job now.

**Participant E.** Participant E was a senior, commuter student who studied Criminal Justice and minored in Psychology. She held three work positions while in college, two on campus and one off campus. She, too, had a unique set of circumstances occur during her tenure as an orientation leader. She was an only child who lived at home with her mother. During orientation leader training, her mother had a serious health episode which required her to remain by her mother's side in the hospital. Fortunately, because she had already been through the training session the previous year as a returning orientation leader, she only needed a condensed training session over the new agenda. While returning to the orientation leader role was familiar to her, she did have several questions over what she missed in training. She was apprehensive and a bit uncertain of the new schedule at the first orientation but quickly regained confidence in her role. Participant E first heard of the orientation leader position through one of the offices representatives on campus. At first, she was reluctant to apply for the position because of her introverted nature but after meeting several of the other student leaders during her interview she felt better about becoming involved with the program. Participant E served as an orientation her first summer participating with the program and returned during the 2017 summer to become a Lead Orientation Leader. Under her lead position, she was given additional duties, such as supervision of a small team of OLs who she gave direction to and guided as needed. With this title came additional responsibilities which were challenging for her to fulfill due to her other responsibilities helping her mother. The position of Lead Orientation Leader was considered a leadership position and was awarded to those leaders who had previous orientation experience but also wanted additional responsibility on the team.

Impact in her own words: Well, it's definitely made me a better communicator which I think is super important for me going to grad school because you have to learn to speak up to professors and then in the workplace, I will have to work with clients and feel comfortable with too. So with orientation, it gave me a lot of chances to practice speaking

to adults. And then I also think it helped me to learn organizational skills because sometimes parts of the day would move so fast, you had to really think on your feet and make quick decisions. And you had to think from the parents' or students' point of view. What's the best way to help them with their question and stuff like that.

**Participant F.** Participant F was a Communication Arts major, Criminal Justice minor in her junior year of college. She originally planned to study education, but decided on communication arts because she enjoyed her classes in theater arts but preferred working in television. She is the younger of two siblings living at home with both of her parents. She had not held a job outside of the orientation leader position because her parents preferred that she focus solely on her schoolwork. Her parents were very supportive of her educational goals and encouraged her to enjoy her time in college. She chose the university because her older brother attended it and it was close to home. Since she did not drive, her parents could easily take her to and from school on their way to and from work. On the day of her interview, she arrived early and was very upbeat. From the way she walked into the interview room, she did not appear to be nervous but because she was smiling, she seemed excited to speak about her experiences. She was good natured and appeared to be comfortable with the process. She first heard of the program through her older brother who participated with the program 3 years prior. He, along with one of the previous coordinators of the program encouraged her to apply for the position because she would be able to network and learn more about the campus.

Impact in her own words: I think orientation helped me make new friends because I wouldn't know my best friend now without it. I'm still so close with everyone and we still hang out and stuff on the weekends and over the breaks. And plus, I know what offices can help with some of my problems that pop up during the year so if my parents ask me how to handle something, I usually know what to do.

**Participant G.** Participant G was a junior student studying Communication Arts and minoring in History. He decided on his major because of his love for movies and curiosity about movie production. He has one older brother and grew up mostly with his father. When he

mentioned choosing this school, he originally planned to attend a Catholic university in his home city until his father suggested one of the other private Catholic schools in the area. He made an appointment to visit the campus and decided it was a better fit for him because people were friendlier with him plus, it was closer to home and had a better communication arts program. In his experiences as a student at this university, he became involved with his campus work-study position in one of the administration offices and served as an orientation leader. He decided to become an orientation leader because he was looking for a campus job during the summer. He began working as an orientation leader in 2016 and progressed into a leadership role in 2017. He approached his interview with a more serious, professional demeanor. He was much more serious than the other participants and demonstrated this by his stiff facial expressions and posture during the interviews. He articulated his words well and took time to carefully think about how he would answer questions.

Impact in his own words: You know, for me, some of my closest friends I have now, I met through being a part of orientation. I would consider them lifelong friends, at least I hope it stays that way. Also, I have my current work-study job because of orientation and I get along great with that office so I'm not sure I would be as "out there" if I didn't do orientation. It seems like it's opened up some doors for me.

**Participant H.** Participant H was a junior Communication Arts major. She chose this college because of the family-oriented environment and the smaller class sizes. She also felt that everyone was respectful of each other and supported one another's goals. In high school she attended a magnet program which specialized in media arts. She explained that she developed a passion for the subject and was involved with the program throughout high school. In college, she wanted to continue her study of the subject because she enjoyed it and already had some knowledge of it. She was a commuter student who lived with one of her relatives in the same city as the institution. Participant H had held retail jobs outside of campus and on campus, she

worked in one of the administrative offices. She was recruited by one of the administrators to become a part of the orientation team because they observed her strong work ethic. She arrived for her interview on time and prepared with a notebook and pencil. She appeared to be a bit shy and reserved at the beginning of her interview. She would give a bashful smile and bring her chin down as if to indicate some uncertainty in her responses. She admitted that she liked to take initiative to help herself grow but she holds back at times because she can sometimes feel intimidated.

Impact in her own words: You know, I just remember when the summer was over and we were saying our goodbyes to the team, I was just really grateful to be accepted so easily by everyone. I was the new girl and I didn't start at the beginning with everyone else and I came into the team later. So there was a part of me that was worried that this huge group of coworkers wouldn't like me or would think I didn't know what I was doing and it just wasn't like that. I don't remember that happening before because in high school I felt like the outsider and like I didn't fit it but here everyone was so nice and they helped me learn the job duties but became my friends at the same time.

### **Participant Summary**

These (eight) students offered a glimpse into their lives by sharing their perspectives about their experiences leading orientation. Many shared similar stories of apprehension and self-doubt at the beginning of their experience and some claimed to experience slight anxiety and fear of the unfamiliar expectations of this leadership position. However, not long after beginning their experience almost all stated becoming better acquainted with their job duties and expectations, they felt a sense of excitement and comradery between team members. The majority of these students were commuters and chose this institution because of its proximity to home and family. Almost all chose to become involved with orientation because a friend, campus administrator or faculty member encouraged them to apply to earn money and also to make additional friends and learn more about their campus.



## **Data Analysis**

Using the constant comparative approach, I initially sought to analyze the data by sorting more frequent phrases from the participants' perspectives into codes. I also looked for more common concepts mentioned by participants and highlighted those phrases to consider them codes. Those codes were then grouped into categories to aggregate and make sense of the data for more in-depth analysis. I then grouped the codes into categories in an effort to aggregate the data for a more in-depth analysis. I was specifically looking for consistent meaning within the respondents' comments and perspectives so I could synthesize and categorize the data together. Specifically, I was looking through their narratives for evidence that their perspectives aligned with my analysis conclusion. By exploring and combining these themes into meaningful relationships, I was able to describe and explain how the OLs' experiences impacted them. Finally, the major elements or themes emerged and became the focus of the findings section.

The procedure for developing the codes, categories, and themes involved (a) collecting and transcribing all recorded interviews, (b) searching for and developing categories from the participants' responses and my observational notes, (c) analyzing the data for recurring emergent themes, (d) analyzing data for content saturation, and (e) re-listening to the interviews for emphasis placed on codes, categories and themes as they relate back to the research questions were:

1. How does participation in student leadership as an OL influence he/she college experience?
2. What does the experience of orientation leadership suggest about what aspects of and how student identity are influenced?

When beginning the data analysis, I collected and then transcribed each interview. The narratives were initially read through entirely and then re-read to identify common phrases or sequences of information which appeared to be key from the observation notes but also seemed to repeat throughout the interview of the participant. These common phrases developed into the initial codes analyzed for further meaning. The goal was not merely to analyze the narrative data collected but also to look for additional data collected from the recordings of the participants' experience. Each individual interview was listened to again and analyzed for inflections in the participants' voices as another level of analysis. If a participant emphasized a word or phrase by speaking it louder or more deliberately as if to emphasize the word, I would make note of it in my analysis. Once this analysis of the data was complete for each participant, the list of codes for each participant was compared for commonality of mentioned codes across all interviews. A dominant list of codes emerged which appeared to highlight how leading orientation impacted participants. Although it appeared saturation was being reached due to the redundancy of information provided by subsequent participants, I was open to the possibility of participants presenting something new. As Morse (1995) concluded, saturation of categories denotes the point at which to end the research.

### **The Orientation Leader Experience**

The job description for an orientation leader can be challenging for student leaders but there are many rewarding components to the position which make it attractive to join. Many students believe it is an excellent way to network on campus, meet faculty, and also make new friends. It's also viewed as a rewarding job that allows students to help incoming freshmen acclimate to their new college environment. At most universities the responsibilities include providing information regarding campus resources and helping new students along with their

parents navigate campus. Initially, the students interested in becoming orientation leaders did so because they were interested in obtaining a summer job which they mentioned in their interviews. In fact, some openly stated during their interviews they were merely looking for a campus job which provided them with enough cash to purchase their books for the next semester. Plus, the idea of working in a familiar environment and alongside their collegiate peers was appealing. These students weren't necessarily thinking about how the job would impact them and some openly stated they joined the program simply because it looked like fun.

Some decided to participate with the program through the encouragement of a well-respected faculty member or close friend. One respondent explained:

I was very reserved the first time I did this [leading orientation] and it took my friends who were already involved with the program to get me to open up more and join the team.

Most participants experienced reluctance to join the orientation team and apply for the orientation position. Many stated the job responsibilities made them feel uncomfortable because of the speaking requirements and the knowledge needed to answer parent questions. One participant acknowledged feeling hesitant to introduce himself in front of a large audience:

At first, I was a little worried about it because you have to be outgoing and there is this run-in and you have to introduce yourself to everyone in front of a lot of people on stage. And it's scary plus you have to be energetic and helpful throughout the day. And I didn't think I could do that really but I'm glad I did because doing this pushed me to become something, I didn't think I could.

He goes on to explain another instance where he experienced some self-doubt joining the group later than everyone else.

I was nervous about going into training because I missed the first day and so I didn't get to learn a whole day of what they did and so everyone knew one another, and everyone was acquainted with one another enough to know who they were sitting next to and who they were comfortable with already when I walked in...so I just sat at the back of the room on the back row. But luckily everyone was very inviting and welcomed me into the group so I didn't feel like the black sheep.

The job description of an orientation leader can be daunting for students because it requires long hours, public speaking, and detailed knowledge of the university. At most universities the responsibilities include providing information regarding campus offices/resources and helping new students along with their parents navigate campus. Another respondent describes some hesitation with becoming involved in a highly visible group of students below:

I was just so nervous about doing it...like there is no way I can do that but I was encouraged to do it...so I applied. I like the fact that you have to apply to become an OL. It made it feel more like it was a job because it was a real job but applying for it also made it feel like it was formal and important. I remember walking in [to the orientation office] and meeting the Executive Orientation Team (EOT) and that was pretty cool. I was a little intimidated because I was more shy then but they weren't rude or anything like that, they were nice and they were just asking questions like, how would you deal with a parent or questions like that, and I said I would just do the best I can and stuff like that and then they accepted me and I was really excited about that.

Many admitted to being nervous about the experience and not fully understanding all it entailed until they went through the training process. Once they walked into to the training room, saw the new faces of other participants they would be working alongside, several students again expressed feelings of nervousness because they didn't know if they would be able to bring any knowledge to the team. They felt inadequate with their experience level. They didn't know if they knew enough about the campus, if they knew all the campus building names, if they knew all the academic programs offered or if they were viewed as acceptable role models for the university. It became especially stressful for those who walked into a room filled with strangers as described by one study participant:

I remember training being a little scary. I got to campus and walked to the training room feeling nervous and excited at the same time. I didn't know if I would know anyone there or if I would have to make new friends.

Some admitted to feeling like most of the other students seemed to know one another and already seemed bonded and sectioned off into groups or cliques. For this situation, the classification level of the leader didn't seem to matter or help with the anxiety level felt.

Training took place the week immediately following spring semester finals. Students were still accustomed to spending much of their time on campus and sitting in lecture halls and classrooms. Training for leaders was conducted for one week, Monday – Friday, from approximately 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. It was a full day of learning how to give tours, the names of buildings, the different colleges, in addition to other major components of campus/university orientation. After listening to their interviews, some leaders admittedly found training to be a tiring experience since they were expecting a respite point at the conclusion of their semester. The leaders' training was planned and coordinated mostly by an executive board of employed student leaders. These students were hired and selected to lead both the parent and student portions of the orientation program with guidance from the college deans and first year administrators. The first major components of training involved completing human resources paperwork, learning how to account for the time worked (timesheet), and meeting key staff they would work with in their new summer roles. Major emphasis was also placed on leaders getting to know and becoming comfortable with their new work colleagues. Ice breakers and community building style games were employed at several points in the training day to help leaders build a bond with one another. In addition, leaders would learn about various administrators and faculty assisting with the program, their roles on campus, shuttle operations, campus mission/traditions, and more. On the first day of training they also learned that there would be a quiz at the end of the week over what they learned, as well as a speaking role-play skit everyone would participate

in. This seemed to make most of the respondents nervous and slightly uncomfortable with the expectations of the job. One respondent mentioned:

Just when I thought I could take a break from studying, I had one more hurdle to jump [because of the quiz].

He later mentioned the experience wasn't too bad but the overall expectations of the job did cause some nervousness. He explained he did not want to mess up in front of a large audience or not know how to answer a parent's question. He considered his role as an orientation leader to be important and wanted to take the job seriously. Once training was well underway and leaders had arrived to the mid-week point, the consensus was that they were feeling only slightly better about their decision to become orientation leaders. Sure, they enjoyed meeting their new work colleagues/friends, going to lunch with them during training days, and participating in ice breakers with them but many expressed high levels of anxiety with the "run-in". The "run-in" was the most talked about, most highly anticipated component of their job expectation. They talked about it throughout the week incessantly. One respondent describes it as:

I was nervous about tripping in front of everyone and I also worried about messing up my lines. We were in the back waiting to run in and we were jumping up and down from excitement. We were also pumping each other up for our introductions. It was crazy but fun.

The required "run-in" was a major speaking role they needed to fulfil in front of hundreds of people. The only good thing about the "run-in" is that they could get it over with in the morning and then move on the rest of the day. During the "run-in", they introduced themselves to the audience, stated their chosen field of study, and offered advice to incoming freshmen. Many of the OLs viewed this as a lot of pressure despite their experience or classification level. And for the new OLs, they had to practice this introduction in front of their new veteran co-

workers in a simulated session held on the second to last day of training. They considered to be similar to giving an oral presentation in the classroom and everyone was required to participate. They also viewed this experience as a rite of passage to becoming an orientation leader.

Another major component of the training was the filming of the introduction video. The introduction video was played for student and parent attendees at the beginning of each orientation day shortly after check-in. The premise of the video was to introduce the orientation leaders in their work teams while also highlighting various campus spaces, such as the library, football stadium, wellness center, and other popular school landmarks. Its origins stemmed from the idea of a former orientation leader coordinator and several of the leadership teams adopted this event through the years. Annually, each new group of OLs worked together to design and produce their unique introduction video or collaborated with personnel from the communications department on campus. When discovering the orientation leaders would star in an introduction video, one stated:

I was confused about the video at first. I didn't know if we would be filming a skit or if they [the audience] would hear our voices but then they [the EOT] showed us examples of what they [OLs] did last year did and it helped a lot [to understand the concept].

The video was essentially their first work assignment as a newly formed team. The leaders detailed all aspects of the video, the only requirements were that the video be mission friendly, highlight the orientation theme, and not exceed more than three minutes. Every leader interviewed liked the energy surrounding the creation of the OL introductory video. They seemed to enjoy the innovation from their peers and the ability to put their own stamp and original spin on it. They viewed it as an exciting part of the training process. One respondent was unable to participate in the making of the video during the 2017 year and explained she was sad she was unable to participate. She said:

The overall vibe was always one of positive energy and I guess it kinda felt like everyone was pretty much pumped to be involved with it [the introduction video].

Every year the orientation leaders had the opportunity to put their own unique spin on the video. Everything from music and location selection along with the story line of the video was all up to the newly formed team. In training the executive orientation team would begin introducing the idea of the video by showing intro videos created by past teams. In addition, the team took headshots and group photos and were also given their team uniforms. The uniform consisted of a school t-shirt and branded polo shirt chosen by the executive team. The leaders were then encouraged to choose between khaki shorts, denim jeans, or slacks to complete the uniform. The executive team allowed the leaders to choose what they felt most comfortable in as the days were long and they felt it was a small way to include the team in the decision-making process.

Most of the orientation leader team considered the final day of orientation leader training to be the most fun. By this time in the week, they were friends with one another, gained more knowledge about their university, received their school polo shirt, and understood expectations of the job. They were also excited about their planned luncheon for the last day of training. It would be a time for them to enjoy one another's fellowship and after wrapping up final presentations, last minute pictures and filming clips, they had a small graduation type ceremony in which they received a certificate of completion, awards and wrote each other "love letters". The letters were another idea adopted by former executive leaders of past orientations by in which each team member would be given a large folder with their name on it. Any team member wishing to write a few lines of encouragement or appreciation to other members could do so and slip the note into another team member's personalized folder.



I remember writing my love letters in training. I still have mine. I thought that was really cute. It made me happy to find out we did stuff like that.

This act became a way of concluding training but also a way of solidifying their new journey together. As a way to thank the team for their hard work during the training week and as a way to end the final training day, the leaders and executive team were treated to an appreciation dinner off-campus. For some, this was their first time dining out and they dressed up for the occasion; for others this was a time to eat with their new-found friends. At this point, most of the stress was over, the leaders described feeling content with their decision to join the team and looked forward to the first day of work.

While the hard work of learning their roles and duties was over for the orientation leader team, the executive OL team had a lot of planning and coordination left to do to prepare for the actual orientation days. Executive team members had their own job duties and sessions to facilitate. Their role in the day included assisting with the planning process, assembling supplies needed, assigning OLs to work different sessions and answering questions of orientation attendees. During the normal workweek, the executive team members arrived to work in the mornings with other campus staff took their lunch hour breaks and often stayed in the office working later than most full-time university personnel do. They viewed their roles as vital to the success of the program and were committed to doing their best work as evidenced by their actions. This commitment was noticed by the orientation leader team members and it seemed to inspire the group to work harder toward the common goal of helping new students better understand the university. I noticed a level of respect for the executive team from the leaders and, although there were several unforeseen hiccups here and there, the consensus was one of excitement and pride of being an orientation team member:

The one thing that I want to say was such a big change and I think this goes for any group, or anything that I've been into, just like with peer mentors, we all know each other and we all get along but I think to have a really good team like that, the best thing was that, to me was to have the solid foundation of executive leaders, as long as you have strong leaders there, it's like a domino effect. The rest falls into place. And that was the same thing that happened to me in dance. They were all respectful of everyone, like with the execute team, I felt like they were all respectful of each other and that went both ways towards us and us back to them. They weren't demanding, they were supportive of you and the team, they weren't pompous. They wanted to encourage you to do this and make me proud kind of thing. So everybody was so helpful too, no one just sat there, it was a collective team effort.

On the first orientation day, executive leaders asked the team to arrive at 6:45 a.m. in one of the assembly halls. There, they would receive instructions for the day and help set up last minute items such as university themed décor (signage, centerpieces, and balloons) and check-in computers, direction signage, etc. Below is a description from one of the executive team leaders on her experiences getting ready for her orientation day:

Knowing I had orientation during the week, would make me happy. I would lay out my clothes the day before and I would wake up with a good anticipation of the day. I was always afraid of being late, but even though I would get here at 6:15 a.m. there were some OLs that would already be here. Maybe they were so excited for orientation, IDK [I don't know], but they were always here and willing to help me get set-up.

At this institution, seven orientation dates were scheduled and spread out through the three summer months. The first of these dates typically came with some confusion and uncertainty regarding proper roles/job duties. But as the summer progressed, the leaders and staff became accustomed to the program requirements and they gained more confidence. Since the actual orientation day was lengthy, breakfast was provided for the leaders and the executive orientation leader team would use this time to go over the day's agenda. Some leaders expressed a bit of concern and experienced some nervousness in anticipation of the day's events. The veterans of the group were expecting an orientation day agenda similar one used in the past and the new leaders had little idea of what to expect. The new agenda was slightly more intricate than the agenda used in previous years and during the morning announcements, the leaders asked a

considerable number of questions about it to better understand it. Although they seemed to be content to begin this journey amongst peers, they did reference feelings of stress and confusion as evidenced below by one leader's comments:

I think the only thing I could say about 2017 was the scheduling in the beginning, but that was because we were used to the old schedule. It was a new schedule that we were not used to.

And another leader indicated:

Summer was a little difficult because we were just trying to organize the schedules in the beginning of the summer. It was still a successful orientation but it just got confusing. The first summer I [led orientation I] had a lot of fun, and I enjoyed it. It was a breeze, but it was the second summer that was a little different for me.

The executive team did their best to explain the new 2017 agenda and clarified to the group this is when they need to use their group chat, which was set-up during training. Every year the orientation agenda would vary slightly based off feedback received from university personnel. If a certain office, such as the Registrar's Office asked for additional time to give their presentation, the entire agenda would be affected and updated. During the OL training, the leaders were introduced to GROUPME, which is an application downloadable to their cell phones. The executive team members asked all OLs to download the application and the OLs would practice using the chat leading up to the first orientation. Everyone could see each other's questions and the answers to those questions from their GROUPME chat as explained by one respondent:

They decided on having a group message that the team started for work communication purposes, but they used it for personal reasons as much as work reasons. They would message each other throughout the week not just on orientation days. They started from training, and it would usually be someone from the team adding other OLs to the group message without being asked by the executive orientation team. This tool was very helpful because everyone knew what was going on all day even if it did not concern them. I knew what was going on down here, even though I was up in the parent sessions.

As freshmen and parents began arriving to orientation registration in the morning, the orientation leaders, who were stationed at different locations on campus, welcomed them and directed them to their first session. Some leaders, stationed outside were assigned the duty of guiding families to designated parking lots reserved for orientation. Once guests arrived into the designated registration and reception areas, leaders escorted them through the check-in lines and guided them to tables, which were set-up for the Business Office, Health Services, Registrar's table, student giveaways, photo booth, etc. These tables were set-up as temporary sub office locations to make access to these offices more convenient to families. For example, if a family needed to turn health records to Health Services and select their payment plan for tuition, they were able to take care of both transactions from the sub office locations set up at orientation registration. When it was time for the introductions, leaders along with staff ushered guests into the main concert hall for the welcome ceremony. There, the university president welcomed guests, the dean from either Student Success or Admissions would explain the outline of the day and expectations, and the executive OL team delivered their introductions following the university prayer. The executive team then introduced themselves and the role of the orientation leaders to the audience and it was time for the introduction video. The executive team would play the intro video and while awaiting their entrance cue, the orientation leader group assembled in the back foyer of the hall with their signs and pom-poms ready to run in and introduce themselves. They were most nervous during this time. One respondent describes how it felt to wait in the hall foyer before the run-in:

I was mostly anxious waiting in the back [before the run-in intros] because I would think this is what the students and parents see first at orientation. It sets the tone for the day. They feel the excitement in our voices welcoming them to the school and no one is monotone. And then there's the video too. Parents seemed to like the video we made because they would recognize us from the video and then ask us, are you the girl from the video with the coffee? You remind me of my daughter. I think they can just relate to it.

Another leader says this about her introduction experience:

I was nervous that I would trip and fall running down the aisles and I was nervous I would flub my words in front of the parents and students, but I always kept a big smile on my face and talked loud into the microphone and it was just fun cheering and running in [the auditorium].

I feel like some of them were kind of surprised to see us running in doing this stuff and being excited to welcome them and I would try not to step on anyone's feet or their bags.

Several respondents thought this was the most exciting part of their day, they knew their video work was being viewed by the audience and they were anxious to know how the orientation attendees were receiving it. They also knew they had a speaking role coming up in the minutes that followed the video and this was an intense moment for most of them. Once the run-in took place, the leaders assembled at the front of the hall and one-by-one passed the wireless mic down the line and introduced themselves. The orientation leaders felt relief when they completed their speaking roles and exited the hall as a team. They were happy to hear the clapping and cheers coming from the audience and there was immense excitement felt in the room by most. Parents and students seemed energized by the leaders and eager to see what else was in store for the day.

It felt good when they would clap for us after our introductions were over. Some [orientation] groups were more energetic and happy to see us than others but overall, it felt like we did our job right because when we would leave the room, they would clap for us and smile at us. At least they made us feel like we got them excited for orientation.

After the morning introductions, leaders helped to clear the reception room and prepared for their next duties. Some of them, ushered students to various locations on campus and others assisted with presentations related to the incoming students' majors. Right before lunch, students separated from their parents and freshmen were guided through the class registration portion of the day. The students attending orientation met their faculty advisors and heard from office representatives from technical support, registrar, and campus life offices. Parents were shuttled

to another location on campus where the parent lunch was provided and where they would be able to interact and ask questions of faculty members, listen to campus safety presentations, and visit with the parent office. One respondent demonstrates her experience working with the parent orientation below:

When it was time for the students and parents to separate, I would also take the parents to the shuttles to that area. I would hop on board our campus shuttle and I would talk to the parents, and say good morning, I'm "participant D", this is where we are going, this is what we are doing and I hope y'all enjoy your stay. They always seemed happy to see me leading them to their sessions, so maybe I was able to help them feel comfortable.

Another more experienced respondent describes her role leading the parent orientation here:

My first experience with orientation was a good transition from being so shy, I was just an orientation leader and I did what was on my job assignments and I would usually only be with parents so that helped me be able to speak more professionally and learn how to talk to a parent, which they could be very much on their stance, and learning or being able to talk to someone like that could be very important because I was already thinking about my future. Some parents are like that, so you have to learn how to become comfortable speaking with adults.

I was assigned to be with the parent orientation because I was bilingual. Spanish is my native language, and a lot of students know Spanish and English, but their parents don't feel comfortable speaking English. They thought it would be helpful to have Spanish speakers up at the parent orientation if they asked questions...at first, I didn't think I was going to like it because most OLs said it was harder to work with the parents but I ended up becoming a leader up there [at the parent orientation]. I didn't want to be down with the students [on main campus]. I was up at the parent orientation the entire summer, because I liked it and I knew what to do, and I took on more of a facilitator role helping the new orientation leaders learn what had to be done and how and when.

This student was also a member of Executive Orientation Team. As a member of this team, she worked in the office preparing for the actual orientation day. She was also responsible for coordinating the day of orientation operations, which took place for parents. Her duties involved relaying the final parent guest count from morning registration to the catering staff as well as working with the facility staff to rearrange tables and chairs if the guest count varied significantly from the original rsvp guest list expected. Her job duties were well suited for her

because she preferred to stay more in the background organizing and facilitating the program rather than be in a speaker role. The leaders assigned to the parent orientation sessions were typically more independent and worked well with the Admissions team. These OLs also needed to feel comfortable carrying conversation with parents and helping them address their questions and concerns.

An additional participant describes how one of her lunch conversations went with a concerned parent:

I know I remember during this one lunch, a parent was very concerned because they don't live in San Antonio. She was concerned about her son, not being close to home. But I comforted her and said y'all can talk every day and just know that he is in very good hands. I said there's going to be people that can help him take care of his needs here. He can adjust well here.

These types of conversations were common at orientation and many times parents felt comforted speaking with other students who were close in age to their own child. Leaders offered candid viewpoints to life on campus and parents sought their opinions on their experiences with the campus.

At the conclusion of the parent sessions, parents were shuttled back to the main campus and both parents and students were reunited at a fair centrally located on campus. The fair afforded guests the opportunity to learn more about different organizations available for them to join. This was the final portion of the workday for the leaders. They helped to set up the tables, ushered organizations to their assigned tables, set-up decorations, and conversed with parents and students about their day. One participant reported his thoughts on the end of orientation day:

I think the most important part of the day was the Festival with all the organizations, especially, since me and the guys would always be setting it up and through that I was able to meet even more people and make more connections. And I genuinely had fun talking to people and that always gave me a great outlook to talk to people on the different orientation days because there were always different organizations there and different representatives from the organizations on campus there. Different vendors,

professors, and students. It was just great to see and continue the experience for the freshman.

The fair concluded at 5:15 p.m. and there was only one more job duty to complete for the leaders, the debriefing session. At this session, leaders were able to speak to any part of their day. They could describe problems that arose, give kudos to fellow team members or ask questions about different scenarios. The student led executive team explained what went well, what needed improvement for the next orientation and generally tried to encourage and resolve issues. This session was comprised of OLs; their OL led executive team and typically one orientation administrator. This session ended around 6:00 p.m. most days with reminders for next time. Leaders reported feeling exhausted but also happy about the work they were able to contribute and the feelings of being able to help incoming students feel welcomed and a part of their new home felt good to them.

The reason I chose to become a part of orientation was honestly so I could start making some extra money over the summer and it ended up being a lot more than that once I got into it...more than a job. It was a good decision for me and I was happy I made the decision and it's something I look forward to doing this coming summer again.

### **Leaders' Experiences**

One of the more common experiences mentioned by participants was the positive experience they felt because of becoming an Orientation Leader. Many described positive experiences during their employment as leaders, but they also mention the benefits of the experience continued well beyond their summer employment. Most of the participants were encouraged to apply or told about the orientation position by a professor or administrator on campus who thought they would benefit from the experience. Most orientation leaders were simply seeking a fun summer job. Below Participant E, describes her employment experience as an orientation leader.



It wasn't just a job, does that make sense? It was more like, I heard a lot of parents ask us, "Are y'all volunteers?", and I was like no, but in my mind I would think, even if it wasn't a paid job, I would still volunteer to do it. Like I wouldn't mind, I would still do it. And I heard a lot of that from a lot of people that were OLs. We were very much close knit, so I hope that continues.

Another respondent mentioned:

After orientation, I still talk to many of the orientation leaders that I was working with, we have our own group chats we go out to eat together, we study together, and we still hang out with one another. It's a lasting friendship that I am very happy that I did it.

This respondent had experience working in other jobs including a fast food chain across close to campus. She also worked on campus with another office as a work-study. This was her second year returning to the orientation team and the executive team promoted her to a leadership role. She describes her orientation experience as:

The job I think that I had wasn't hard, it wasn't hard at all it was just like keeping on top of everybody. And I don't feel like I had to struggle to have people listen to me. When you see orientation leaders and not just the orientation leaders, when you see the EOT (Executive Orientation Team), work so well the way they did, and then also work together well with the orientation leaders, you kind of get this cohabited balance you know of people that just work well together.

Below are reflections about their experiences from each of the leaders who participated in this study:

I want to do that again, it was just so much fun. We are all very chill, we are all very supportive and we get along great. And during orientation it's not going to be as scary as you think it is. And as long as you do your job very well and are positive, everything will be fine. And there is a very good chance you will make great friends and great memories.

Orientation was the one thing every year that I had circled on my calendar, because that was the one thing I always looked forward to during the summer. That was my one way of hanging out with people. Again, how often do you hear that statement, hey I'm looking forward to going to work today? I got to be on my feet for 12 or 13 hours of the day, but hey I'm getting excited to go to work. And um, just to see everybody grow, that was the biggest thing. It was just neat to see that growth of everybody on the team. If I had to say one negative thing, I just feel like there were moments where people got too comfortable. And like I understand it's a long day, nobody wants to be up at 6:45 in the morning unless you're like me but when you come in it's like it's all a go. We basically need to act like were energetic. I've been doing this for 4 years, but there is a reason I came back. It feels like home.

My friend told me she was getting paid to have fun working orientation. It was a good experience, and a good way to network and grow myself professionally, and personally because it helped me. I was very shy, and she said I was going to get paid and I could save money for the semester. And she said I would get to know the faculty, especially for nursing, the faculty will see that I am active on campus, and they would get to see me, I could become more visible to them.

Overall, being part of orientation made me happy. The run-in was fun and how excited they were when the OLs would talk to students and families, the teamwork that was shown, the bond, and the immediate interaction they would have with students and families, they were genuine. They would take pictures with them and it was neat to see how that helped them feel welcomed.

You know its super fun. It was a lot of teamwork, because you work with other people from all over the school. And plus we make a video and we run in and we introduce ourselves together. So it's very different for us that were shy and everything and then we come out of our shells, and then they got really excited about orientation. So I feel like that is so cool. I think it also builds confidence because when I started I didn't know I was going to get my master's degree. I was already struggling these first couple of years in school so I wasn't sure but then [after the experience] it gave me courage because no matter what I can do it. It's going to be hard but I feel I can do it.

Going into it, I actually did enjoy the experience and it was really, really good. It was engaging to motivate other students because that's what I did in ROTC [in high school]. Seeing the new students and breaking them out of their shells, or getting them used to what college is really like was a good feeling. Trying to tell them, you're not going in this alone. That for me was always the fun part. Being a part of orientation, impacted me positively, we came out of the end of the summer very tired but during the process for me on a personal level, it helped me get a little more out there. With representing [the school]. Because remember my orientation, I don't think I talked to that many people, just the one friend that came with me that day, so I took that as my prime example to not be like that anymore, and I got a lot more talkative with both the OLs and the students as well as parents actually, I talked to a lot.

Orientation helped me to be more social and to get out of my comfort zone and take initiative which I do take initiative but sometimes I can be really shy which makes me not want to talk to people especially like younger kids because they have their own little personalities so you just don't know how to approach but it just made me grow as a person. So I think it's going to help me in the real world learn to work with a team. Plus like you learn to work with different personalities too. Because everyone has their own vision on how they get a certain task done, so I think that orientation helped me to learn how to compromise and learn to work with everybody in a team versus on my own. The last orientation got me emotional because I came into this thinking everyone would have their own little cliques and being new, I didn't know if I was going to be accepted or not but everyone made me feel very welcomed. It was great because you don't find that everywhere on campus. Because like even my band stuff, everybody has their own

cliques and it's just drama but like with the orientation leaders it was like everybody was just like positive and there was just a lot of positive energy.

I remember my experience [with orientation] happily and with a smile, and I'm glad I did it due to the fact that I did learn some things about myself in that I am able to talk for hours on end and that I am able to maintain a high level of energy, I do what needs to get done. I've met so many fantastic new people through orientation that I talk to almost on a daily basis, we hang out all the time on and off campus. And I got a better understanding of the campus itself, because before, I would even get lost, and not know where places are but now I know the Gorman building is, what the Joyce building is, What the "HIT" building is, what the music building is, all this other stuff so. And then I think I grew as a leader too because before I would be really nervous if someone asked me questions and I would kind of like get the jitters, but after going through leading orientation I was able to pick up on my jitters and take a breath and take a step back, and focus, like I do know this answer, and answer what needs to be answered. And even now, I'm good at presenting, because, I got to speak in large groups at orientation, so it definitely helped with my presentation skills, and in my public speaking class, and in my CIS classes. I've honestly like, become braver just to raise my hand and answer a question in class but/like before I wouldn't be able to be as confident.

At first I was a little worried about it because you have to be outgoing and there is this run-in and you have to introduce yourself to everyone in front of a lot of people on stage. And it's scary plus you have to be energetic and helpful throughout the day. And I didn't think I could do that really but I'm glad I did because doing this pushed me to become something I didn't think I could.

Below is a preview into one participant's thoughts and how she views the impact of orientation on herself:

Well definitely, I think it's helped me become a better communicator. I don't think I'm the best communicator... with orientation leading, I got to interact more with parents. So I think that for me, I felt like I could communicate more with them, so for instance, I was the only child, so I grew up with adults. So I've kind of been in that mindset since I was little. I didn't have a problem talking to students and parents, they want to know what's going to happen next, so you can't have anyone that's all meek and like "Oh I don't know"...you have to have someone that at least felt comfortable with it because I felt like yes, they could be abrasive, but I felt like I knew where they were coming from.

This study participant was one of the more talkative students interviewed and she was also one of the older student interviewed with plans to graduate just a few months after the interview was recorded. She participated with orientation for 2 years and was in her senior year.

Her plans after graduation include graduate school with her preference leaning toward law school. She continued her emphasis of becoming a better communicator:

Also adding on to communicating with older adults, like staff and faculty...that was really helpful because I'm going to have to get used to doing that in my career and then, also more confidence. Yeah, with speaking to older adults and being confident about it has helped me. I still need to work on it but it's been easier to see how things work and then you kind of learn what it means to have a job in the adult world so that was helpful but also interesting. It's different from having a job like when you were a teenager. It's a lot more responsibility but it's like, now I know.

She goes on to describe additional impacts on becoming aware of how things are perceived by others with an emphasis on presenting herself and the university well:

Organizational skills was another thing I was able to improve upon, and I have been organized for a while but it was more like, making sure that everything looks the way it's supposed to look, and making sure everything looks neat and organized so that parents can just come in and they can see what they need to see and see that we prepared for them and go to lunch.

Lastly, she goes into detail about how she views her involvement with orientation and how she sees its potential impact to her future career:

I've written a lot about it [orientation] on my law school applications, how it's helped me really find my voice so the communications skills again, but my voice aside, it's helped me realize what kind of leader I want to become. And I still want to grow because I don't think you ever stop growing as a leader. I think that [orientation] has helped me a lot with law school because in law school I'm going to have to talk to adults a lot. Especially professors and ask them for advice or ask them to explain things to me again.

It basically teaches you basic skills of social interaction. That was good and the whole voice thing and the type of leader I want to be, I don't want to be abrasive and so I practiced things like that, even when I was LEAD and that was really helpful and if anyone needed help, I'll help you and if I don't know the answer, I will go find the answer for you. It definitely taught me how to use resources, it taught me how to find out the answer when I didn't know it myself. Those are the kind of skills I want to incorporate into becoming a lawyer, and I hope that even the law schools see that, because I can't just expect to get out of law school, and then go into a court room and you know I'm going to have certain expectations, from clients you know you're going to have to be competent in law and competent in a courtroom in front of a judge and in front of a defense attorney, or if I decide to go in a law firm, but you know I'm going to have to work with people so you're going to have to see different personalities and work with different personalities, because that's mostly what jobs are anyways, is working with different personalities, and having to really use my skills in order to get the results we all want. But that's a lot of

what orientation has taught me is how to communicate and that's really helpful, because I will definitely need that. And uh, it's taught me so much, that's the big thing though, I like that it taught me a lot about resources and how to work with other people and different people.

Oh and orientation leading has definitely helped me with connections, as in knowing the right people and knowing who these administrators are and who faculty are, and which ones are you going to get more of an answer from, which one would you get more communicative skills from because I've always liked interacting with faculty and that has helped me out a lot. For instance even being here and being a peer mentor and all these other things, so it's kind of like the job I have here on campus would not have been possible without connections, and then they know you and it's funny because you can tell a teacher, yeah I'm an orientation leader and they are like OH OKAY, I understand.

Feeling connected to their university and to other peers helps students persist and be successful academically, in fact, there is a strong relationship between a feeling of belonging and persisting to graduation (Tovar et al., 2009). In addition, the greater the sense of belonging to the academic and social environment, the greater the persistence to graduation for the student.

One respondent articulates how working within a supportive environment and feeling accepted helped shape his experience:

So all day we were helping one another and checking on each other, so we were able to see each other all day, and we were all in the same environment. We didn't all know what we were doing on the first day, but we were all learning as we went and we were learning together and helping one another. And everyone was open and accepting and no one bullied anyone, it was more supportive in the environment.

This student was a new member of the orientation group and had not been a part of a work group on campus. He states his decision to join the team was to acquire additional income and although he considered himself an extrovert and had many well cultivated friendships, working on a team was relatively new to him. He goes on to describe his experience as feeling accepted into the group:

No one excluded anyone from the group. If you wanted to sit with one group at lunch you could and if you wanted to sit with another group at the next orientation you could, and you were accepted and you didn't need an invitation. You were welcomed with open arms and everyone on the team was willing to take you in. You wouldn't have any confrontations. I think that through training and the EOTs with the ice breakers, it helped

a lot and basically what they were doing is letting us all know that, we are all in the same boat, and that we are all in the same situation with one another, no one is different and everyone is the same but each of us all has their own story so as long as you worked together, trust one another, and helped one another, everything would work out and that's exactly what would happen and what we did and that's why we have a lasting friendship.

Another respondent, was the only child of a single mother and although her preference was to gain more experience working with adults, she offers her insights on her experiences working within her peer leadership group.

They were all respectful of everyone, like with the EOTs (Execute Orientation Team), I felt like they were all respectful of each other. They weren't demanding. They were supportive of you and the team and they weren't pompous. They wanted to encourage you...like do this and make me proud kind of thing.

In addition to working on campus with orientation, this participant was also involved with one of the athletic teams who he travels with and spends a great deal of time with during the athletic season. He joined his athletic team his first year and he shared different experiences within the two teams here:

Yes, I do travel and I train with the fencing team. In my opinion, it's not much of a team, because there are like these cliques within the team and they are separated, I feel as though, me myself, I just go from group, to group, to group, and I am more like the neutral one. I don't actually hang out with them, except for a few handful of people from the team because everyone is more separated in their cliques. It's not an actual team mentality. The whole team is not close, I only hang out with 3 or 4 team members but not with the team if that makes sense. However, with orientation, it's more like a family. It was more like, everyone had each other's phone numbers, everyone adds each other on Instagram, and on Snapchat. We all have a GROUPME chat that still goes on now. If we see one another on campus, we are more than just friendly with one another. We stop what we are doing and we want to know how they are doing and how things are going with them, how their day is going, if there is anything we can do for one another. We also hang out with each other on a daily basis in the SEC (Student Engagement Center) or FYE (First Year Engagement) Office, we make each feel like more of a family than anything really.

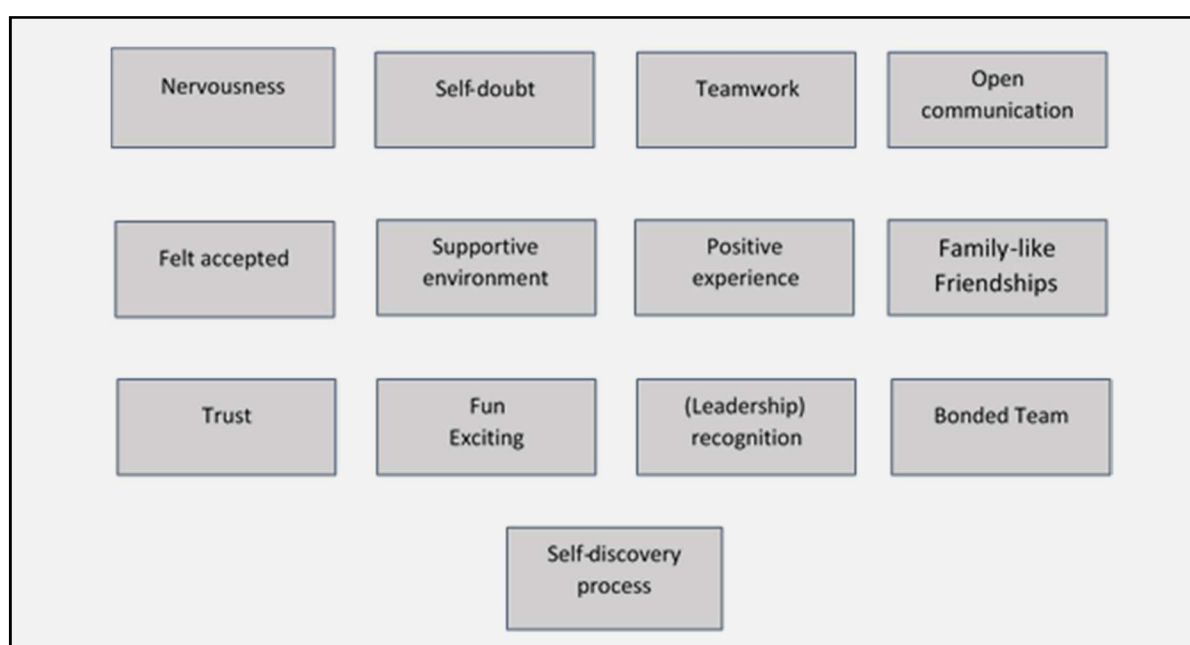
This leader goes on to explain the differences and feeling included/connected to the orientation team:

It feels more like a family because over the summer, we saw one another almost on a weekly basis, but that one day was a full day from 6 a.m. to 6 or 7 p.m. or later if we went to eat dinner together after work...I met a lot of my closest friends today from that first day of training, [friends A, B, C, D, E], and we went out to eat together that same day to Taco Bell. They were polite enough to ask me if I wanted to go with them to lunch on what was my first day of training but their second day of training so I felt included right away. They were open enough to include me in their group. You could just genuinely tell they wanted to get to know me and include me. They wanted to make the connection with me.

## **Emerging Themes**

During the interviews, I asked questions designed to get participants to recall their orientation leader experiences so that they would inform my research questions. I conducted interviews to generate information from the respondents that would enable me to build a grounded theory or at least build a model or framework which describes the phenomenon of leading orientation. Analyzing the data which emerged from the participant interviews involved a series of challenging tasks. First, reflection on the data as they were being collected from each participant was done by listening to the recorded interviews in their entirety from beginning to end. It also helped to begin listening to the interviews from different stages of the recording since each interview was close to an hour long. I used this strategy to allow ample attention to all sections of the interviews and not only the beginning. Beginning with the first review of the audio data collected, recurring themes began to emerge. I began to notate codes the participants mentioned with special emphasis. This could have been highlighted by their facial expression or hand gestures made during their interviews which was notated in the observational notes. I compared these notes to the emerging codes after the initial transcription and codes were documented. As an additional layer of analysis, I paid special attention to the inflection in their voices and listened to the audio recordings of each participant numerous times to capture this information not available from the transcriptions. I repeated this process after each of the

collected interviews from participants until data saturation was reached. I determined saturation because no new information was being presented by the informants. I continued to ask questions of the participants until I saw a consistency develop in their responses. Much of the information they were providing in the later interviews was easily categorized in one of the resulting codes below. See Figure 1 for the codes, most commonly referred to in the collected data, which began to emerge from the orientation leader participants' view of their involvement.



*Figure 1.* Codes which emerged from the first phase of analysis.

The above-mentioned codes begin to tell a story about the leadership experiences involved with serving as an orientation leader. To be more specific and to go into more detail, these codes emerged from listening to the recorded interviews more than six times each. After listening to the interviews, I transcribed the recording and codes were counted to determine which codes surfaced as prominent themes emerging from analyzing the data. In addition to listening to the interviews, I also read the transcriptions of the interviews approximately 8 to 10 times each. I documented the codes and tallied for the number of times the codes were



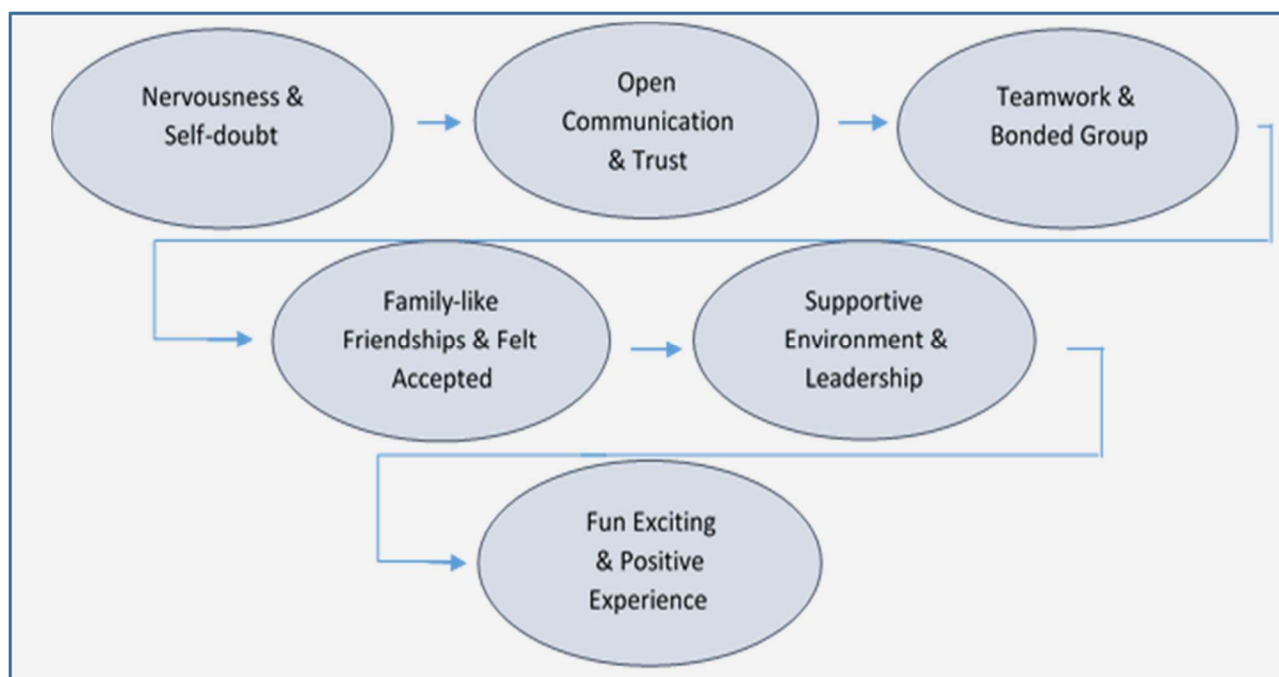
mentioned within the interviews. Tallied codes ranged from being mentioned five times up to 21 times. The top two categories emerged 21 times as, a positive experience they would like to have again, and 20 times, as supportive work environment. This system of sorting the codes into categories gave an organized understanding of how the OLs experienced involvement in orientation and how that involvement might have impacted them. Overall, orientation leaders thought their experience provided a positive, supportive environment which allowed them to form family-like friendships while affording them an opportunity to connect more closely with their university.

Initially, I grouped the codes together in a chronological sequence as mentioned by each respondent (see Figure 2) but because each respondent began describing their experience from various starting points of their personal recollection, the sequential order did not consistently align. After more in-depth analyzation, I weighted the codes by frequency or the number of times mentioned in the interviews by the participants (see Figure 3).

The research questions asked were:

1. How does participation in student leadership as an OL influence a OLs' college experience?
2. What does the experience of orientation leadership suggest about what aspects of and how student identity are influenced?

There were several different ways they believed their experience in college was influenced after their participation in the program. First, despite feeling nervous about beginning the program, each one of the respondents mentioned forming new peer friendships from their work experience as an OL was significant to them. They viewed this as having a positive impact on their experience because it helped them to feel like they belonged at the university. They also



*Figure 2. Categories which emerged in chronological order from the first phase of analysis.*



*Figure 3. Categories which emerged by frequency from the second phase of analysis.*

always felt like they had a place to congregate and meet with one another despite their classes being scattered throughout the day at different times. In fact, months after their interviews took place, these students were still seen traveling in small groups together on campus. They mentioned that they try to meet with one another over lunch or in between classes to catch up and stay in communication with one another. One student explained, this is important to college aged students because when students arrive at college, they typically leave their childhood friends they've grown up with for the past 12 years. Many of their friends begin working full-time and form new friendships in the workplace. In addition, they also have high school friends

who attend college in various locations and the same connections they have grown accustomed to suddenly change. Another way their participation in the group impacted students is by helping them to feel more comfortable viewing themselves as leaders. Almost all expressed some hesitation with speaking in public to the large orientation crowds, they all recognized a sense of growth in their abilities to complete the necessary job duties and as a result felt a sense of accomplishment. More than one respondent mentioned that this has helped with classroom presentations and was a confidence booster for them. They also mentioned feeling more comfortable approaching faculty at the university. In fact, several have formed bonds with faculty members because of their role as OLs and this has benefited them by helping them gain access to scholarships and work-study positions. They also expressed more comfort working with offices such as Career Services, to update their resumes with the job duties they acquired as OLs. Overall, while their experiences as OLs required long hours and waking up early, giving up part of their summer, all respondents believe the experience to be positive and beneficial to their growth as students.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data obtained from participants, I engaged the use of member checks, which is a way of validating the data. The use of member checks allowed participants of my study the opportunity to review transcriptions of the data I collected and transcribed from their interviews. Only five of the eight students interviewed looked through the transcriptions. Although I explained they could edit, or add to the documents, none expressed a request to do so.

## **Chapter Summary**

The initial reason for conducting this study was to develop a better understanding of how serving as an orientation leader impacted student leaders. It is hoped that the data from this study

will help administrators, faculty and students gain insight into programs which can benefit student success. From the data collected from in-depth interviews with participants and also observational notes, codes developed into concepts and concepts into three main categories emerged. The participants communicated that their experience as orientation leaders caused some nervousness and self-doubt when they were learning about their role and job duties. Many felt unsure if they would be able to perform the duties required. Through their collective work experience, they also indicated that they felt supported and accepted in their role as leaders by administrators and their peers, which led to their final feelings of being involved with an overall positive experience, offered a supportive environment. It is hoped that by learning more about these leaders' perspectives, we can improve the orientation program for students attending the program and for students who participate as the leaders of the program. While many researchers focus on the outcomes of the participants of orientation, there is a lack of research dedicated to the leaders themselves.

## **Chapter V: Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of how serving as an OL impacted the student leaders who carried out orientation. The focus of this study centered on these answering questions:

1. How does participation in student leadership as an OL influence their college experience?
2. What does the experience of orientation leadership suggest about what aspects of and how student identity are influenced?

This chapter begins with a summary of the research study. I then offer a summary of the findings, including participants' responses and how they relate back to Astin's involvement theory. Additionally, I include recommendations for further research. I conclude with a reflection of my experience as the researcher, possible biases, my perceived ideas, and possible effects on participants.

While there is much literature on college student involvement on campus, little has focused on the relationship between involvement in campus held positions and the perspectives of students participating in these programs. In fact, many notable scholars have emphasized the correlation between student involvement beyond the classroom and academic success, personal growth, and satisfaction with the college (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Astin (1993, p. 389) asserts that holding a position on campus affords a "degree of immersion in the collegiate environment...which compensates, in terms of student outcomes, for the time that students must devote to a part-time job". He concludes that working on campus holds more value to the student simply because he or she is surrounded most of the day by peers and faculty.

The participants of this study shared perspectives, which stemmed from a central question that began each interview. I then asked clarifying questions to identify areas of emphasis on an individual basis. I recorded interviews with participants and took observational notes to collect the data for this study. This allowed for in-depth insight into the experiences shared by participants and allowed me to collect their perceptions of their involvement in leading orientation. The findings of this research were not based solely on the amount of information provided by participants, but also on the outcome of a deeper look into the perspectives of each individual. I accomplished this by reviewing the data multiple times and layering the data analysis. The analysis of the individual and collective responses were found to be significant because value was found in both realms of data. The chapter's themes helped provide a comprehensive interpretation of the participants' experiences.

### **Summary of Findings**

For this qualitative study, I selected a grounded theory research approach to explore the perspectives of the OL participants. Grounded theory was selected as a way of exploring the experiences of student leaders and also to attempt to build a theory or explanation of the phenomenon taking place with these students. Because I was seeking to discover how the experience of being involved in campus led activities impacts the students, I selected Astin's theory of involvement as the theoretical framework. In his theory, Astin (1984) asserts that involvement centers on the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to their academic experience. According to Astin's theory, a student who is actively involved both academically and socially will get more from their college experience through their investment in the learning and development process (Astin, 1984). Through this research, he developed five basic postulates about involvement as it relates to students. The first postulate involves the

student's investment of psychosocial and physical energy. The second postulate describes how involvement is continuous and how students invest varying amounts of energy into their college experience. Thirdly, involvement is comprised of both quantitative and qualitative measures. The fourth describes how development is directly proportionate to quantity and quality of the student's involvement. And lastly, the fifth postulate encompasses educational effectiveness and how it relates to the level of student involvement.

From a pool of 30 orientation leaders, I invited eight student participants to be interviewed. Their levels of experience leading the program varied from 3 years of experience to no experience. In addition, in an effort to provide feedback representative of the pool, three male and five female students were interviewed. From the data collected in their in-depth interviews, I used the constant comparative method to data analysis to identify open codes, axial codes, and selective codes or central themes which represented their experiences leading orientation. This meant I continuously reviewed the data from each participant which allowed for a more collective review of the data. Once this was completed, I compartmentalized the data into smaller units of information so as to recognize words or phrases which offered a meaningful identification relevant to the study. The data were later coded into categories which eventually gave way to the themes found to be the major findings of this study.

I chose to conduct in-depth interviews for my study because I was seeking to generate information which may enable me to build my grounded theory. I also believed this data collection method could relate back to and answer my research questions. Each interview began by asking the participants to openly describe their experiences as OLs. The interviews were designed to encourage each participant to speak openly regarding his or her experiences, followed by an assessment as to whether their information actually explained specific points.

When necessary, additional clarification questions were asked to identify key variables presented by each individual through the use of an interview guide. Field notes also helped me to discover a deeper meaning in determining the codes and categories of the data analysis. In using them during the interviews, I would make note of participants' facial expressions, body language, dress, timeliness and preparedness for the interviews.

According to each of the participants, even though each applied for a leadership role on campus, feelings of nervousness and insecurity arose as they began serving as OLs.

Alternatively, several participants revealed that, despite their initial hesitation to participate in the many speaking roles, they were glad they had committed themselves to the position. Many mentioned feeling a sense of accomplishment and growth as they pushed themselves to share the experience with their peers.

Another central theme mentioned by participants was the experience of positive growth. This included the opportunity to develop as a leader on campus and to be recognized and appreciated for his or her contributions to the program. In addition, the value of the experience of being involved in a supportive work environment along with peers was emphasized by most participants.

### **Nervousness and Insecurity in Leadership Role**

In the course of interviewing the participants of this study, I discovered that each one of them felt a sense of reluctance to participate in significant areas of leadership. Public speaking roles, along with giving specific directions to the parents, were the most feared and uncomfortable components of the job. Many of the participants felt comfortable with their knowledge of the location of the campus buildings, of parking, and housing, and could answer general questions about the campus. However, these new OLs experienced insecurity and self-



doubt for being made responsible for such a significant program. They feared not knowing the answers, giving wrong information and, overall, were afraid of compromising the experience of the incoming freshmen and their families. One student described their experience as:

I was just so nervous about doing it...like, there is no way I can do that!  
I wanted to have a little more responsibility, but I didn't want to overload myself and I thought leadership roles were better for other people. I was afraid I wouldn't know what to say or where to take the students or I would mess up on my introduction. I just didn't want to mess anything up for the school or the students. It was kind of scary at first.

Nevertheless, to see the new OLs acknowledge their growth over the summer; how they, from being new to the experience and not knowing what to expect, grew into confident campus leaders, became uplifting to discover over the course of this study. Their sense of confidence and excitement was apparent at the beginning the fall semester. Here is an excerpt from the transcriptions:

I was worried about going up to the parent orientation, but then I saw how much we worked with faculty and you really see how much they rely on orientation leaders. Everybody goes up to orientation leaders and how happy they were to have our help. The parents and the faculty would rely on me to help them and it made it easier on me to think I can help them with this.

### **Supportive Peer Work Environment**

The participants from this study enjoyed a sense of comradery and developed a common friendship amongst one another during their time serving as orientation leaders. They believed that working as a leader on campus helped them feel more connected to the university in a positive way. Despite the hard work they might have faced with their grades during the academic year, the summer season provided them a respite from the academic rigor of being a college student and afforded them the opportunity to work alongside their friends and peers. While they were still learning, serving as OLs offered them a chance to draw income for themselves but also offered them the prospect of help incoming students learn more about their university. Using

Astin's theoretical framework helped this study to explain empirical knowledge about environmental influences on student development through a psychosocial lens. As Astin's (1984) theory of involvement defines, these student leaders' investment of physical and psychological energy, which occurred during the summer of 2017, both quantitatively (time spent working) and qualitatively (amount of focus to orientation), appears to have had a positive impact on their academic success. Many of the students mentioned feeling more confident in their abilities to speak in front of the attendees of orientation and also felt more comfortable leading a group. It is easy to see how these qualities can also translate into the classroom environment and into a future work environment.

The findings from this study did not result in a grounded theory but instead a descriptive analysis of the phenomena from the perspective of the orientation leaders. I attribute this to a lack of information which did not surface during the interview, rather than a lack of data collected. I believe this may have occurred because the study participants provided much more detailed preliminary information and were very thorough in their responses regarding training and the details of the initial orientation days. I believed this information to be extremely valuable in providing a detailed look into the participants' experiences. But, in an effort to not overwhelm or over exercise the participants, I decided to conclude with this information rather than push the participants for additional information which could lead to the development of a grounded theory. The information they did provide, however, revealed that while student jobs can sometimes be undervalued, campus offices who are able to spend more time intentionally planning the development of their student workers, could positively influence the development of their students. And if institutions advertise the purpose of their student job positions and explain the significance of accepting the position, students may feel more valued as they would

be contributing to a greater cause than themselves. This becomes important because it has the potential to positively influence the student's academic success in the classroom, their motivation to do well during their college experience, and eventually persistence to graduation.

### **Recommendations for Additional Research**

This study also demonstrated that understanding the experiences and perceptions of these leaders provides insight into ways to improve programs and share valuable information with the staff and the educators who supervise the process.

Additional research is recommended to advance the findings of this study on a more expansive scale. This study was limited to one private, faith-based institution, and concentrated on a specific and relatively small number of students. Other studies centered on specific genders, ethnicities, or age groups/classifications would also be worthwhile as well as their persistence to graduation. This study centered on an institution and specifically on its first-generation students. It was not the main focus, but it could prove valuable to other educators.

A replication of this study, employing mixed methods of data collection (qualitative and quantitative) could also prove to be beneficial to catch any additional insights which may have been missed by only using a qualitative research design and to increase generalizability to additional institution. While this would expand the significance of the data generated, it would also provide more generalized data to be studied and analyzed.

In addition, possible re-organization of the training, so that the OLs are more interactive with one another, rather than prescriptive, may prove to be advantageous. The OLs should be organized into smaller working groups and negotiate real scenarios which could arise during orientation in peer problem solving groups while the members of the Executive Orientation Team (EOT) serve as facilitators of this process. The EOT is made up of an orientation team

composed of four or five students who had expressed interest in leading the orientation leader team. They must be people who had previous orientation-leader experience and must have demonstrated leadership potential on campus.

### **Conclusion Overview**

As this study has shown, becoming an Orientation Leader has a positive impact upon the students who chose to participate in the Orientation Program. It is a common assumption is that someone applies for a leadership role because he/she possesses the necessary confidence needed to become a leader. This assumption is not always the case. Most, if not all of these students interviewed for this study, were at first hesitant about the prospect of becoming a leader and, in the beginning of their employment, were reluctant to accept leadership duties. However, because of the peer group cohesiveness, which was intentional goal outcome of the OL training session, and collective effort, these students grew to become valued campus leaders. As they grew more accustomed to their work duties, they became more confident and more comfortable speaking with faculty and staff in various positions on campus. Recognized as campus leaders, they felt a sense of accomplishment and were ready to begin the new academic year with greater self-esteem than they had possessed in the past.

As a whole, each of the OLs observed and interviewed for this study had their lives improved and their education and future placed in a more hopeful perspective. In fact, even student athletes viewed their experience in leading orientation for the University as an advantageous team builder for the university community. For example, Participant A clearly indicated that leading the Orientation program increased his self-confidence about his own abilities, facilitating his classes in Public Speaking and Computer Information Systems; Participant B, a Nursing major, was shy and reluctant at first during her interview, but then grew assertive and authoritative, revealing that, as a student at

the University, she had progressed to the point of becoming not only an OL but even the Director of Parent Orientation; despite her uncle's insistence that she should choose a university closer to her hometown, she had valuable experiences at UIW; Participant C revealed that he greatly enjoyed his work as an OL in 2017 and 2018, growing evermore confident about facing life's challenges and becoming a Lead Orientation Leader; Participant D, who played sports in high school, declared that her becoming an OL exposed her to becoming a leader on campus. The experience made her feel she had a valued and that she belonged in a leadership role; Participant E, an introvert by nature, revealed that she developed a comfort level speaking with administrators after her experience as an OL. She believes her participation with the program improved her organizational skills, especially her ability to talk to adults; Participant F, a Communication Arts major, not only concluded the experience having her best friend as an Orientation peer, but also greatly increased her knowledge about all the resources available to her on campus; Participant G chose UIW partly because his first friendly contacts with campus officials, including OLs; as an OL in the Summer of 2017, he found his experience helped to secure a work-study position and also helped to bond him with some of his closest friends; and, finally, Participant H, who described herself as shy and reserved, but acknowledged that her experience as an OL made her feel grateful for being easily accepted by everyone. Although in high school she felt like an outsider and intimidated, as an OL she felt at home, learning how to do her job duties and making many friends.

As we can see, the OL experience had a positive impact on each of the participants involved in this study. Many institutions educate our youth today to be the leaders of tomorrow and the OLs not only grow into leadership their roles through their service to others, but they can also potentially have a major impact on the kind of college environment new students enter into, especially, at a smaller school such as the one in this study. The OLs who, as the interviews reveal, emerge from this

experience more mature and confident in their capabilities not only as leaders but also as students of the university. It makes the education process ever more effective for the student leaders and also for the student attendees of orientation. A well-managed Orientation Program utilizes several campus offices to help participants of orientation understand the roles of these offices and how representatives from these offices can become resources to the new students. This has the potential to create a truly friendly educational environment for the orientation participants but can also assist in uniting campus leadership. Finally, as these pages attest, the goal of this dissertation was to richly describe the details of the participants' experiences serving as orientation leaders and their perspectives on the impact of their involvement in leading orientation. From this study, I was seeking to learn more about the orientation leaders' development and aspects of student identity after leaders participate in training and orientation implementation. The overarching goal was to explore orientation leadership experiences in a passionate effort to better serve those students during their academic journey. In my workplace, I have been fortunate to meet and develop mentoring relationships with hundreds of students seeking guidance and support to achieve their academic, personal and career goals. I have seen them face a number of roadblocks at first, but also witnessed how they eventually achieved their academic dreams. Many of them stay in touch and have shared their dreams, thus making their friendship even more rewarding and meaningful.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A Recruitment of Participants Email

Good afternoon:

My name is Rochelle Ramirez, and I am doctoral candidate at the University of the Incarnate Word, in San Antonio, Texas. I am conducting a qualitative research study, under the supervision of Dr. Arthur Hernandez, in the Dreeben School of Education. I will be the sole researcher conducting this study which focuses on students who participate in summer orientation and how they perceive their involvement and development as leaders. Your participation as an orientation leader qualifies you to become a possible participant. This email has important information about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way I would like to use information about you if you choose to be involved.

You were identified as a possible study participant because you have experience serving as a summer orientation leader at the University of the Incarnate Word. I would like to request your assistance and consideration in participating in my study entitled *A Grounded Theory Study of Orientation Leaders' perspectives on the Impact of Their Involvement in Orientation*. The purpose of the study is to learn more about orientation leader development after participation in orientation leader training and programming. Findings from this study will be aggregated from all participants rather than presented as individual cases and may provide further insight into orientation leader development and ways to further enhance their college student experience. Results may also be used to help other people such as administrators and faculty to improve future orientation leader training and programming. Should you decide to accept this invitation, I will conduct one in-depth interview which will take up to one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded, to ensure I accurately remember all the information you provide. I will later transcribe

the interviews myself, or utilize a transcriber or transcription software and your identity will be connected to the interview information you provide. The audio recordings will be kept until I complete all of my data collection. After which, I will delete all the identifying information about you as the informant so I can have the general characteristics of the group. All of the information collected about the individuals in the group will be kept confidential.

**Study time:** Study participation will take up to 2 months in total and will include at least a one-hour interview with each participant until the saturation point is reached. After transcription, I may contact you to ask you additional questions. A follow up single stage of data collection with supplemental clarification of responses may be used but only if needed.

**Study location:** All study procedures will take place at the University of the Incarnate Word campus.

Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. While I do not foresee any possible discomforts to you, I would like you to be aware that you may encounter some minor nervousness or anxiety during the interview process. You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell me, the interviewer, at any time if you wish to take a break or stop the interview. Know you are free to not answer questions or to skip to the next question.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information I collect from you could be breached – I will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will keep recorded interviews locked in my office and they will only be accessible by me. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead. With the recorded interviews, I will analyze and create materials for my dissertation manuscript, possible journal articles or presentations. In the event that this study or any portion of it is published, you will not be identified nor will feedback be traced back to your participation. Your data will be incorporated into the total main body of my study. I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name. All identifying information will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. Once transcription has been completed and verified, I will delete the audio recording. The only record of the interview will be the remaining transcription. Should you have any questions about the study or your participation in it, you are welcome to contact me.

I will retain the information collected for 3 years and may use or share the data collected from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers – if I share the data that collected about you, I will remove any information that could identify you before I share it.

If I think that you intend to harm yourself or others, I will notify the appropriate people with this information.

Should you have any questions or need further clarification prior to me contacting you, please feel free to reach me via telephone at 210-805-3004, 210-846-5775, or e-mail at [rramire2@uiwtx.edu](mailto:rramire2@uiwtx.edu). You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Arthur Hernandez, e-mail at [aeherna8@gmail.com](mailto:aeherna8@gmail.com) if you have any questions. Lastly, if you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the following office at the University of the Incarnate Word:



Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA, Research Officer

Institutional Review Board

University of the Incarnate Word

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(210) 805-3036

Thank you and I look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,

Rochelle Ramirez

## Appendix B Interview Guide

### 1) Introductions & Verbiage

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this this interview. My study seeks to gain a better understanding of the orientation leaders' perspectives of their participation in the program. The overarching goal is to improve the experience for future participants while learning more about what things we do that are helpful or are not helpful for you. Human/social capital, specifically orientation leaders' satisfaction with their experience, is vital to the success of the overall program. The orientation program is continuously seeking ways to improve outcomes from session to session and year to year.

I would first like to learn a little more about you before we begin the interview. My questions are designed to get a sense for how you think about leadership and will provide a context for understanding your responses to the interview questions.

### 2) Personal Background of the interviewee

Before we start, please remind me:

- a) What is your major?
- b) What is your classification (sophomore, junior, senior) at Incarnate Word?
- c) Tell me about your decision to attend this university.
- d) In what other extracurricular roles or activities have you served while attending college.

### 3) Orientation Specific Questions

- a) How/why did you decide to become an Orientation Leader?  
orientation leader training
- a) How did training prepare you for your role, if at all?
- b) Was there something about your training to be an orientation leader, that influenced you (made you more or less confident) about yourself?
- c) How would you alter training?

### 4) Beliefs and Values about your own leadership

- a) What do you think constitutes a good orientation leader?
  - b) As an orientation leader, what are your goals?
  - c) What do you want to accomplish as an orientation leader?
  - d) What are the sources of those ideas?
  - e) Do you read about leadership in your courses? Or have you read about leadership research?
- A) Now, I would like you to think back over the orientation day and recall an experience you were especially pleased with.
- a) What happened that day that made you happy?
  - b) If I had observed the event, what would I have witnessed/seen?
  - c) What tasks or duties would I have witnessed you performing?
  - d) What would I have seen the attendees or parents doing?
  - e) What do you think the value of this event was for those involved?

B) Now try to recall an event that you were especially disappointed with.

- a) What happened that day that you were disappointed with?
- b) If I had observed the event, what would I have witnessed/seen?
- c) What would I have seen you doing?
- d) What would I have seen the attendees or parents doing?
- e) What do you think was learned from this event compared to what was hoped as the outcome?

**5) Main Issues to Address in the Interview**

- a) How would you describe your participation in the program?
- b) What experiences have you had which contribute to your response?
- c) What value do you think you get out of your participation? Or what is the benefit to becoming an orientation leader?
- d) How would you describe your role as an orientation leader to someone else?

**Interview Probes**

- Tell me more about that.
- Can you give me an example?
- What would that look like?
- How do you do that?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- What were other people doing then?
- Why was that important to you?
- Why does that stand out in your memory?
- Why do you think you noticed that?
- Why does that matter?
- What motivated your response?
- How did you feel about that?

Appendix C  
IRB Permission

**CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION**

**Study Title:** *A Grounded Theory Study of Orientation Leaders' perspectives on the impact of their involvement in orientation.*

**Principal Investigator:** Rochelle Ramirez

**IRB Study Number:** 17-05-008

My name is Rochelle Ramirez, and I am doctoral candidate at the University of the Incarnate Word, in San Antonio, Texas. I am planning to conduct a qualitative research study, under the supervision of Dr. Arthur Hernandez, in the Dreeben School of Education. I will be the sole researcher conducting this study. Your participation as an orientation leader qualifies you to become a possible participant. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way I would like to use information about you if you choose to be involved in the study.

**Why are you doing this study?**

You are being asked to participate in a research study about student leaders. You were identified as a possible study participant because you have experience serving as a summer orientation leader at the University of the Incarnate Word. The purpose of the study is to learn more about orientation leader development after their participation in orientation leader training and programs. Findings from this study will be aggregated from all participants rather than presented as individual cases and may be used to improve future orientation leader training. It may also provide further insight into orientation leader development and ways to further enhance their college student experience.

**What will I do if I choose to be in this study?**

I am inviting you to participate in this study. Should you decide to accept this invitation, I will conduct an in-depth interview which will take up to one hour. Interviews will be audio recorded, to ensure I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will later transcribe the interviews myself, or utilize a transcriber or transcription software. Once the transcription is completed and

verified, I will dispose of the audio recording to ensure confidentiality. The only record of the interview will be the transcription.

**Study time:** Study participation will take place over a period of approximately 2 months and will include one individual interview lasting up to one hour. If I have any questions, following the transcription of the recorded conversation, I may contact you to ask you additional questions.

**Study location:** All study procedures will take place at the University of the Incarnate Word campus either in classrooms or orientation event spaces.

University of the Incarnate  
Word IRB Approved  
Application #: 17-05-008

**What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. While I do not foresee any possible discomforts to you, I would like you to be aware that you may encounter some minor nervousness or anxiety during the interview process. You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell me, the interviewer, at any time if you wish to take a break or stop the interview. Know you are free to not answer questions that make you feel comfortable or to skip to the next question.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – I will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

**What are the possible benefits for me or others?**

You are not likely to have any direct benefit from being in this research study. This study is designed to learn more about the leadership development in students

participating as orientation leaders. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

**How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?**

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will keep recorded interviews locked in my office and they will only be accessible by me. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead. With the recorded interviews, I will analyze and create materials for my dissertation manuscript, possible journal articles or presentations. In the event that this study or any portion of it is published, you will not be identified nor will feedback be traced back to your participation. Your data will be incorporated into the total main body of my study. I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name. All identifying information will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. Once transcription has been completed and verified, I will delete the audio recording. The only record of the interview will be the remaining transcription. Should you have any questions about the study or your participation in it, you are welcome to contact me.

I will retain the information collected for 3 years and may use or share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers – if I share the data that collected about you, I will remove any information that could identify you before I share it.

If I think that you intend to harm yourself or others, I will notify the appropriate people with this information.

**Financial Information**

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

### **What are my rights as a research participant?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. We can take a break, stop and continue at a later date, or stop altogether. You may withdraw from this study at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation.

If you decide to withdraw from this study, I will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used.

### **What if I am a University of the Incarnate Word student?**

You may choose not to participate or to stop your participation in this research at any time. This will not affect your class standing or grades at University of the Incarnate Word.

### **Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this research study?**

If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Rochelle Ramirez at (210) 846-5775, (210) 805-3004, or rramire2@uiwtx.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the following office at the University of the Incarnate Word:

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA,  
Research Officer Institutional Review Board

University of the  
Incarnate Word  
San Antonio Texas  
78209  
wandless@uiwtx.edu

(210) 805-3036

## **Consent**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

### **Consent for use of contact information to be contacted about participation in other studies**

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

\_\_\_\_\_(initial) I agree to allow the researcher to use my contact information collected during this study to contact me about participating in future research studies.

\_\_\_\_\_(initial) I do not agree to allow the researcher to use my contact information collected during this study to contact me about participating in future research studies.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date