

## Empowering Student Leadership Beliefs: An Exploratory Study

Sara B. Marcketti and Sara J. Kadolph  
*Iowa State University*

Leadership beliefs contribute to behaviors and attitudes. The purposes for conducting this study were 1) to gain an understanding of undergraduate students' leadership beliefs, 2) to implement three distinct leadership modules into an introductory textiles and clothing course, and 3) to assess the modules' effectiveness in promoting empowering leadership beliefs. The study used quantitative and qualitative methods ( $n=76$ ). Findings suggest undergraduates' perceptions of leadership encompass trait and situational perspectives of leadership. The modules influenced students' understanding of the varied definitions of leadership and empowered them to consider that the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of leadership were attainable.

Leadership development is a focus of schools, universities, and businesses, yet "there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (Stogdill, 1974, p.7). Research on the topic has taken many approaches, with a plethora of models, theories, and perceptions seeking to define and explain the leadership concept (Gregoire & Arendt, 2004; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). Leadership, while not clearly defined, is a sought-after trait among employers searching for job candidates and a necessary ability once students are employed (Frazier, 2007). The importance of leadership qualities such as creating and managing change, learning to learn, and interpersonal skills such as collaboration are firmly established in the literature (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Wheatley, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 2003).

According to *The Partnership for 21st Century Skills*, which is a consortium of business, education, and media groups, there is deep concern among U.S. employers that young people are not adequately prepared with the skills to compete and thrive in the global economy (2006). An overwhelming 81% of employers polled indicated that leadership was "very important" for new entrants with a four-year college diploma. For both two-year and four-year college graduates, lack of leadership was the second most frequently reported applied skill "deficiency" (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2006). Although many authors and employers have stressed the need for strong leadership skills for workforce readiness, a clear definition of leadership remains elusive (Frazier, 2007).

A student's definition of leadership may play a significant role in whether the student perceives herself as a leader (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). Astin and Astin (2000) contend that some perceptions of leadership promote constraining beliefs that limit student participation in leadership experiences. They conclude that leadership development programs should focus on instilling empowering beliefs in college students, and

they define empowering beliefs as liberating thoughts that allow a student to believe that she can have an influence and make a difference. These empowering thoughts encourage students to become involved as leaders in their home, work, and school communities (Astin & Astin, 2000; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004).

But how do you teach leadership? Similar to management techniques, leadership can be learned through experience and education (Arendt & Gregoire, 2005; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkardt, 2001; Strategic Direction, 2008; Tuleja & Greenhalg, 2008). Current leadership theories suggest that leadership development is a learning process (Brown & Posner, 2001; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Despite the difficulty in teaching leadership, students benefit from exposure to the diverse perspectives of leadership theory and practice (Anderson, 2007).

The importance of leadership education for today's undergraduate students cannot be underestimated. In their future careers, undergraduate students will experience the unpredictable global market of today's work-environments (Kunz & Garner, 2007). To succeed, students will need these aspects of leadership: the ability to find and synthesize diverse sources of information, to manage self, and to empower others. Thus, models of leadership education, integrating theory, training, and experience are necessary (Hartman, Conklin, & Smith, 2007; Molt, 1995). Although many undergraduate students will become leaders in their profession, there are limited opportunities for leadership development and education (Walker, 2006). As such, a more deliberate and intentional focus on leadership development could provide undergraduate students with perspectives and motivations to take full advantage of leadership opportunities, which can be limited at this stage of their lives.

The researchers' purposes for conducting this study were 1) to gain an understanding of undergraduate

students' leadership beliefs, 2) to implement three leadership modules into three recitation sections of an introductory textiles and clothing (TC) course, and 3) to test the modules' effectiveness in promoting empowering beliefs of leadership. The authors developed three modules, one for each of three recitation sections based on the evidence that learning occurs through experience, critical reflection, and discussion regarding beliefs (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Stenger, 2004). The study was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board. Funding for the project was received from the Miller Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Institute, Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT).

### Review of Literature

The leadership literature includes more than 10,000 books and articles seeking to describe, define, and assess leadership theory, practices, and processes (Yukl, 1994). Two of the most widely accepted leadership propositions offer distinct perspectives. One is that good leaders must have the "right" qualities or traits to lead including vision and commitment. The other perspective holds that leadership is situational, dependent upon the people and the setting involved (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Researchers have produced an abundance of studies on effective leadership. While no characteristic is universal in these studies, some show up more often, such as the importance of articulating a vision, creating focus and direction, and showing commitment or passion (Clifford & Cavanagh, 1985; Collins, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Beyond vision, passion, and trust, agreement amongst scholars dissipates. The leadership literature has generated a long list of attributes associated with effective leadership: self-confidence, various interpersonal skills such as friendliness and kindness, intelligence, decisiveness, authenticity, etc. (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Kouzes and Posner (2007) found that honesty was first on a list of traits people most admired in a leader. Some research suggests that the best leaders are smarter and work harder than others (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1994). Komives, Lucas, and McMahan maintain that the most effective leadership occurs through a relational process of people working together to accomplish a common goal (1998). A few studies have even suggested that beauty could be a hindrance in attaining leadership positions (Horton, 1985).

Some scholars argue that women bring a "female advantage" to leadership by demonstrating concern for others and a willingness to share information (Rosener, 1990). Popular press literature has also trumpeted women's leadership skills with stories such as "Women smash business myths" (Miniter, 1994). For the most part, however, the available evidence suggests that men

and women in comparable positions are more alike than different (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Komives, 1991).

Despite their similarities, women represented less than seven percent of senior executives and 2 percent of CEOs in *Fortune's* Global 100 companies (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Numerous scholarly and popular studies have investigated the many factors (e.g., gender-role stereotypes; lack of mentors; discrimination; greater home and family commitments) that contribute to or inhibit the success of women in upper echelon careers (Belkin, 2007; Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Keeton, 1996). The non-profit advocacy group Catalyst reported in their 2007 study, "The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don't," that gender stereotypes can create several predicaments for women leaders. Because they are often evaluated against a "masculine" standard of leadership, women are left with limited and unfavorable options, no matter how they behave and perform as leaders (Catalyst, 2007).

People learn leadership skills and behaviors in many ways, namely through experience, observation (with reflection), and education. Kouzes and Posner (2007) and Howell and Costley (2001) report that people learn to lead through trial and error, observation of others, and education. The Center for Creative Leadership found that in addition to experience, observation, and formal training, successful executives learned leadership through reflection and discussion of hardships they had endured (McCall, Lomardo, & Morrison, 1988). Thomas and Cheese (2005) conclude that an experience-based approach combining on-the-job experience, life experience, and specific skill development can assist career and leadership development. Watson (2001) suggests students and academics need to bring together their accounts of the various experiences and observations (from practical experience or research work) and, where appropriate, use academic concepts and theories to better understand leadership concepts (Watson, 2001).

### Methods

To achieve our goals of better understanding undergraduate students' leadership beliefs, we created a questionnaire that asked students to state their agreement with adjectives describing leadership. Students were instructed that their participation in the leadership activity was a part of their involvement in the course, but that their participation in the survey was voluntary. All students in the course participated in the activities and the survey. We utilized the questionnaire during the first class period and again following the implementation of the leadership modules. The three recitation sections participated in three distinct

leadership experiential activities. The post-test included a section designed to measure students' perceptions of the leadership modules. Results of the survey were shared with course instructors, students in the class, and at two university CELT sponsored-events for faculty interested in the scholarship of teaching.

**Participants**

Participants included students enrolled in an introductory class in the TC undergraduate program. The two-credit course, entitled Professional Development for the Fashion Industry, was offered for the first time in spring 2007 and provided an overview of the apparel industry. Content information included career exploration, presentation and professional skills, professional behavior and standards, and the building of teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation skills. The introductory nature of the course and the emphasis on teaching applied skill sets lent itself to the topic of leadership development. The course was team-taught by two academic advisors/lecturers in the TC program. They allowed the authors, their colleagues, the opportunities to meet with the class, first to distribute the pre-test during a combined class session and then to meet with the students during their recitation sections to administer the modules and the post-test. There were seventy-six students in the course registered at the beginning of the semester. Students enrolled in the class met for a one-hour combined class session and one of three one-hour recitation sections.

**Demographic Information**

Table 1  
Demographic Information

Demographic Information	Number	Percentage
Classification		
Freshman	52	68%
Sophomore	13	17%
Junior	11	15%
Gender		
Female	75	99%
Male	1	1%
Age		
18 years old	49	65%
19 years old	16	20%
20 years old	11	15%
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	72	95%
African-American	4	5%
Classification within Major		
Merchandising	42	55%
Design	30	40%
Undecided	4	5%

The majority of students included in the seventy-six-person course were freshman Caucasian females, aged 18 years old and enrolled in the TC Program.

Approximately 10 of the 76 students had transferred to the university from local community colleges or geographically near-by universities. Further demographic information may be found in Table 1.

**Survey Instrument**

The questionnaire developed for data collection included a list of forty-five adjectives relevant to leadership and compiled from the existing literature (Gregoire & Arendt, 2004; Komives et al., 1998; Northouse, 2001). These sources provided information regarding the changing notions of leadership, from simplistic definitions of traits to more complex explorations addressing leadership within both personal and professional relationships. These sources were used because they reviewed the leadership literature from 1900 to the late 1990s and early 2000s. Traits such as honesty were consistently mentioned across the leadership literature, yet other skills such as creativity and knowledge and social adeptness such as friendliness were mentioned as key leadership abilities by some but not all authors. Synonyms of words were used to avoid potential problems with semantics and the potential vocabulary limitations of entering students. The list of words was reviewed for clarity by a three-person panel of leadership and scholarship-of-teaching experts in CELT. They recommended limiting the list to 45 adjectives to avoid student fatigue that may be experienced with long surveys.

Students were asked to rate the extent to which the 45 words described leadership. The items were placed in alphabetical order, and each was given a five-level response option: (1) rarely, (2) slightly, (3) moderately, (4) considerably, and (5) extremely. An example of the wording was, "To what extent or degree is it important that a leader is accepting?" The pre-test asked students to select the five most and the five least essential characteristics of leadership. The third section requested demographic information to determine if it influenced leadership perceptions.

**Procedure**

Following the pre-test, the researchers implemented three leadership modules into the three recitation sections of the introductory TC course. The purpose of the modules was to instill empowering beliefs into college students, primarily that each of them possessed some leadership skills and that leadership is multi-faceted and learnable. The students were asked to read three chapters in Komives, Lucas, and McMahon's *Exploring leadership: For college students who want to make a difference* (1998). Chapter one, entitled "Leadership for a changing world," included the concepts that leadership development is of

concern to all of us, leadership can be exhibited in many ways, and leadership qualities and skills can be learned and developed. Chapter two, “The changing nature of leadership,” provided an overview of leadership theories and beliefs of the twentieth century. Chapter eleven, “The mind, body, and soul of the leader,” discussed the importance of renewal and reflection in leadership development.

Following their reading of the chapters, students were instructed to attend their recitation session with written responses to the following questions adopted from the text:

- Which definition of leadership [described in the *Exploring Leadership* book] best describes your personal philosophy? Explain.
- What motivates you to demonstrate leadership in your (school, home, work) life?
- What daily activities would cause renewal in your own life?

Within the recitation sections, students were led in small group discussions of the readings by the researchers and were then asked to critically examine how the readings reinforced or influenced their beliefs regarding leadership. In addition to this reflection, students participated in leadership modules that included elements of experience, critical reflection (the examination of long held beliefs), dialogue, and individual development. The distinct modules included a panel presentation (section 1 met on Monday), a leadership assessment inventory (section 2 met on Wednesday), and a guided discussion (section 3 met on Friday).

The first module presented in section 1, a panel presentation by four community and peer-leaders, included the president of the local downtown shopping district’s “Main Street Cultural District,” a merchandising coordinator for a corporate clothing chain in Chicago, a state representative of the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America, and an elected student producer of the annual TC fashion show. Panelists provided an overview of their educational and professional lives and responded to prompts from the instructor such as “What is your leadership philosophy?” “How did you develop your leadership skills during college?” and “What advice do you have for students currently enrolled in the program to strengthen their leadership capabilities?” Panelists also answered questions from students within the class. Themes expressed by the panelists included the importance of involvement in leadership posts within organizations, interest in a wide-variety of extra-curricular activities, and the

significance of leadership traits such as dedication, honesty, commitment, persistence, and courage. Many of the leadership terms, traits, and behaviors identified by the panel were identical to those listed in the pre-test.

The second recitation session (section 2) completed a leadership assessment inventory, “As I see myself behavior style profile,” created by The Effectiveness Institute (2007). The profile was a self-scoring assessment that measured and summarized the strengths and challenges of four behavior styles: controller, stabilizer, analyzer, and persuader. After completing the assessment, students were placed into groups of similar behavior styles and answered questions such as “How does your behavior style contribute to your preferred leadership style?” and “What strategies could you use to work collaboratively with other behavior styles?” Students then worked in two groups in the completion of an experiential activity, moving a small ball on metal poles across the classroom without touching the ball. Upon completion of the activity, students discussed the influence of their behavior styles on their participation.

In the third recitation session (section 3), students explored their perceptions of leaders and leadership styles. Divided into groups of three to four students, each member of a group listed the names and characteristics of ideal leaders whom they admired and then the names and characteristics of leaders society admires. They then compared answers within their small groups and, after twenty minutes of discussion, developed one list of leaders and leader characteristics that they mutually admired. This exercise was adopted from Johnson and Johnson’s *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (2003, p. 177). This recitation section further completed a leadership development plan in which they identified a goal related to their leadership development and then created a strategy for achieving the goal. Following participation in the modules, all of the students completed a post-test including the 45-adjective list of leadership terms, questions evaluating the modules, and the question “What did you find most surprising about the leadership modules?”

## Results

### Students’ Leadership Beliefs

The results of a paired sample t-test comparing students’ initial leadership beliefs ( $m=3.94$ ) with their leadership beliefs on the post-test ( $m=3.80$ ) indicated a significant decrease in students’ agreement with the leadership statements (t-value = 2.25; p-value equals 0.00). Descriptive statistics for the responses to the adjective lists are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.  
Descriptive Item Statistics\* for the Pre- and Post- Student Responses \*\*

Pre-Test Adjectives to Describe Leaders*	Pre-Test <i>M</i>	Pre-Test <i>SD</i>	Post-Test Adjectives to Describe Leaders*	Post-Test <i>M</i>	Post-Test <i>SD</i>
1. Dependable	4.79	0.44	1. Dependable	4.59	0.80
2. Ambitious, motivated	4.74	0.49	2. Honest	4.50	0.76
3. Honest	4.58	0.84	3. Ambitious, motivated	4.46	0.93
4. Hard-working	4.58	0.57	4. <i>Confident</i>	4.40	0.89
5. Committed, loyal	4.57	0.72	5. Committed, loyal	4.40	0.89
6. Optimistic, positive	4.51	0.84	6. Hard-working	4.38	0.85
7. <i>Organized</i>	4.47	0.80	7. Motivational	4.37	0.76
8. Alert, attentive	4.47	0.62	8. Optimistic, positive	4.35	0.90
9. Motivational	4.46	0.79	9. <i>Decisive, determined</i>	4.33	0.68
10. <i>Ethical</i>	4.43	0.69	10. Accepting, tolerant	4.32	0.70
11. Accepting, tolerant	4.42	0.67	11. <i>Enthusiastic</i>	4.22	0.76
12. <i>Personable, friendly</i>	4.40	0.96	12. Alert, attentive	4.22	0.83
13. <i>Confident</i>	4.39	0.92	13. <i>Organized</i>	4.21	0.97
14. <i>Decisive, determined</i>	4.38	0.65	14. Collaborative	4.21	0.77
15. Collaborative	4.38	0.86	15. Experienced	4.20	0.75
16. <i>Enthusiastic</i>	4.37	0.74	16. <i>Ethical</i>	4.20	0.88
17. Experienced	4.30	0.65	17. <i>Personable, friendly</i>	4.16	0.97
18. Educated	4.24	0.87	18. Kind	3.99	0.87
19. Active, energetic	4.14	0.74	19. Active, energetic	3.95	0.86
20. <i>Intelligent</i>	4.12	0.73	20. Punctual	3.95	0.98
21. Kind	4.09	0.93	21. Educated	3.93	1.06
22. Mature	4.03	0.91	22. <i>Current, up-to-date</i>	3.91	0.98
23. Punctual	4.03	1.05	23. Charismatic	3.88	1.09
24. <i>Creative</i>	3.97	0.78	24. Mature	3.86	0.93
25. <i>Calm, composed</i>	3.91	0.98	25. Adventurous	3.84	0.92
26. <i>Assertive</i>	3.91	0.83	26. <i>Intelligent</i>	3.83	0.99
27. Charismatic	3.88	0.96	27. <i>Visionary</i>	3.82	1.02
28. <i>Current, up-to-date</i>	3.87	1.09	28. <i>Dominant</i>	3.77	1.09
29. Adventurous	3.85	0.83	29. <i>Creative</i>	3.76	0.94
30. <i>Volunteer</i>	3.82	1.10	30. <i>Calm, composed</i>	3.76	0.99
31. Empowering	3.82	0.98	31. Empowering	3.72	0.90
32. <i>Visionary</i>	3.79	1.09	32. Reflective, insightful	3.70	0.92
33. Articulate	3.76	0.87	33. Articulate	3.65	0.87
34. Reflective, insightful	3.72	1.04	34. <i>Assertive</i>	3.63	1.00
35. Authentic	3.67	1.13	35. Authentic	3.45	0.90
36. Managerial	3.65	1.13	36. Analytical	3.45	0.99
37. <i>Dominant</i>	3.61	1.13	37. Managerial	3.40	1.17
38. Analytical	3.57	0.99	38. <i>Volunteer</i>	3.30	1.18
39. Entrepreneurial	3.43	1.12	39. Entrepreneurial	3.30	1.11
40. Formal	3.33	0.98	40. Formal	3.20	1.14
41. Humorous	3.21	1.09	41. Ecologically-minded	3.20	1.05
42. Ecologically-minded	3.08	1.04	42. Humorous	3.05	1.19
43. Celebratory	2.98	1.11	43. Celebratory	2.70	1.08
44. Controlling	2.72	1.12	44. Controlling	2.42	1.15
45. Good-looking	1.78	1.00	45. Good-looking	1.74	0.97

\*Rank-ordered from highest to lowest mean

\*\*Words that experienced the greatest movement between their pre-test and post-test positions are italicized.

T-tests were used to determine the significance of the difference in means from pre- to post-test. Each of these t-tests showed significant differences. While the ranking of most of the words to describe leadership remained within two positions from the pre- to the post-test, there were some noteworthy changes. Words that experienced the greatest improvement in students' stated agreement included the words confident, decisive, and enthusiastic. The ranking of other words decreased in significance from the pre- to the post-test. These included the words organized, ethical, and personable/friendly. Table 3 presents the words with the

greatest differences in rank from the pre- to the post-test.

It is noteworthy that the means of the majority of the adjectives decreased from the pre- to the post-test. This suggests a growing understanding of the multi-faceted nature of leadership and the difficulty in defining the term leadership and its many characteristics. In spite of the lower scores for almost all terms between the pre- and post- tests, the results are consistent with those of previous literature that says leaders are perceived to be dependable, honest, ambitious/motivated, hardworking, and committed/ loyal, and that leadership is perceived to

Table 3  
Greatest Differences in Ranking of Words from the Pre- to Post-Test

Word	Rank Pre Test	Rank Post Test	Difference
Confident	13	4	+9
Dominant	37	28	+9
Current, up-to-date	28	22	+6
Decisive, determined	14	9	+5
Enthusiastic	16	11	+5
Visionary	32	27	+5
Creative	24	29	-5
Calm, composed	25	30	-5
Organized	7	13	-6
Ethical	10	16	-6
Intelligent	20	2	-6
Assertive	26	34	-8
Volunteer	30	38	-8

be least related to being good looking, controlling, celebratory, or humorous. Several other terms (active/energetic, articulate, and authentic) remained at a similar ranked position between the pre- and post-tests.

75) = 2.293,  $p=.020$ ), transfer-student status ( $F(1, 75) = 1.649, p=.106$ ), high school graduating class size ( $F(1, 75) = .908, p=.538$ ), or option area within the TC program ( $F(1, 75) = .665, p=.765$ ).

**Module Effectiveness in Promoting Empowering Leadership Beliefs**

Following the modules, students were asked to reflect on their participation in the leadership modules and rate the modules’ effectiveness in promoting empowering leadership beliefs. Students responded to statements: 1) I am more willing to cooperate with others when they are in a leadership role; 2) I possess some of the skills related to leadership; 3) I am interested in developing my leadership skills while taking courses or participating in organizations; 4) I feel more confident about myself as a leader in work, school, home, and other leadership situations; and 5) I understand there are many definitions of leadership and opportunities for leadership to occur. Responses were provided via a five-level response option: (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) somewhat agree, and (5) strongly agree. Table 4 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the responses to the questions regarding the effectiveness of the modules

Table 4  
Module Effectiveness with Means and Standard Deviations

Questions	Mean	SD
1) I am more willing to cooperate.	3.99	0.86
2) I possess some of the skills related to leadership.	4.42	0.75
3) I am interested in developing my leadership skills.	4.10	0.90
4) I feel more confident about myself as a leader.	3.97	0.78
5) I understand there are many definitions of leadership.	4.62	0.71

Total means for the five questions demonstrated agreement with the idea that the modules promoted empowering beliefs such as willingness to cooperate with others, and that students possess skills related to leadership, are interested in developing their leadership skills, have increased confidence about their leadership capabilities in diverse environments, and understand that there are many definitions of leadership and many opportunities for leadership to occur. The modules’ effectiveness was not dependent on the demographic factors related to age ( $F(1, 75) = 1.6931, p=.095$ ), gender ( $F(1, 75) = .402, p=.950$ ), classification ( $F(1,$

Student written comments supported the quantitative results of the leadership modules in the undergraduate classrooms. This was especially true regarding the possession of skills related to leadership and understanding that there are many definitions of leadership and opportunities for leadership to occur. Student comments included the following: “I thought it was interesting to see the evolution of the meaning of leadership from the 1800s until now,” “[I was surprised] that leadership comes in so many forms and ways. I didn’t realize there were so many definitions of leadership, but when I think about it, it’s true,” “It is interesting that you can actually put leadership into categories and how many different people, past and present, fit into the different categories,” “I realized that everyone has leadership potential in some capacity,” “I have some qualities of leadership that I never

considered as important to leadership, such as honesty,” “I realized you can be a leader in any area in your life,” and “I am surprised to discover that I'm going to be a pretty great leader someday after all.”

### Discussion

The results of this study provide interesting points for discussion. First, the agreement with characteristics of leadership did not change significantly from the pre- to the post-test. This suggests that undergraduates' perceptions of leadership encompass trait and situational perspectives of leadership. These results reinforce past research that suggests leadership is not easily defined and is very dependent upon personal experiences, beliefs, and understandings (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). Further, the decreased means for the words from the pre- to the post-test suggest students were less convinced that specific terms signified leadership traits, skills, and behaviors. The authors believe the reading of Komives, Lucas, and McMahon's *Exploring leadership* book may have influenced students' more fluid and nuanced understanding of the concept of leadership.

There was overwhelming agreement with the notion that the leadership modules influenced students' understanding of the varied definitions of leadership. The modules empowered the students to consider that the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of leadership were attainable. While the specific activities of the modules were distinct in the three recitation sections, in all three sessions, theory was integrated within the process of dialogue, experience, and reflection. Students gained exposure to leadership theories, experienced leadership through observation and/or participation, and were provided the opportunity to reflect on their past and current leadership beliefs. The results of this study reinforce the idea that leadership is a process of self-reflection, dialogue, critical reflection, and individual development (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Stenger, 2004). While we did not assess students' actual changes in leadership skills, it is vital for college instructors to understand that a student's definition of leadership may play a significant role in whether the student perceives herself as a leader (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). The results of this study suggest that exposure to leadership concepts are the first step in encouraging students to consider themselves as leaders in their home, work, and school communities (Astin & Astin, 2000; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004).

Due to women's limited leadership roles in the highest echelons of business and government, it is vital that institutions of higher education, especially programs that are predominantly female, consider ways to incorporate leadership development throughout the undergraduate experience. Respondents' overwhelming

agreement to the statement “I possess some of the skills related to leadership” suggests students need to be made aware that they already possess significant leadership traits and behaviors.

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SARA B. MARCKETTI is an Assistant Professor in the Textiles and Clothing Program and Curator, Textiles and Clothing Museum, Iowa State University. Her research interests include the history of the ready-to-wear apparel industry, ethical consumption and business practices, and the scholarship of teaching.

SARA J. KADOLPH is the Donna R. Danielson Professor in Textiles and Clothing. She has been a

faculty member at Iowa State University since 1980 in the area of textile science. Her research interests include natural dyes, textile product performance, and textile and sewn product quality assurance. She is the author of many scholarly publications and several textbooks including *Textiles*, 11th edition, and *Quality Assurance for the Textile and Apparel Industry*, 2nd edition.

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