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# **PATTERNS OF ENGAGEMENT IN SERVICE LEADERSHIP: FIRST YEAR TO SENIOR YEAR**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper describes a model of service leadership that can be followed by university students throughout their academic career. The intent of this project is to help students understand their growth in civic responsibility and leadership and to put it in context with the growth of other students. Using a grounded-theory approach from quantitative and qualitative surveys and case studies, the research team of seven undergraduates and two staff members from the Schreyer Honors College developed three distinct, non-exclusive tracks that revolve around a theme of vision development. The three tracks include *Service to the On-Campus Community*, *Service to the Local Community*, and *Service to the National/Global Community*. The results, although addressing different questions, are consistent with the developmental model of service leadership proposed by Delve, Mintz, and Stewart (1990). Future research directions include refining the survey and expanding this pilot study to include a larger sample of students.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study describes a model of service leadership that any incoming student can pursue. Moreover, this model is offered to administrators, faculty, staff, and student leaders in the hope that it will be used as a guide to encourage students to fulfill civic responsibility through service leadership. Three distinct, non-exclusive tracks revolve around a theme of vision development. They are based on students who have been successful at following a service leadership track. In detailing the tracks, two methods were used: a survey and case study interviews.

While data about service and service leadership was collected both quantitatively through the survey and qualitatively through the case studies, this project did not begin with a definition of either term. Through discussion, it was found that definitions of service and service leadership are as diverse as the people defining them. As a result, each of our case study subjects was asked to define the two terms, and the following definitions were compiled:

*Service* is to share one's talents to benefit others and to fulfill community needs. It is to give more than one expects to receive in return.

*Service Leadership* is the process of inspiring, motivating, and empowering others, getting them involved in service and pushing them beyond what they believe they are capable of achieving.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to these authors, Schreyer Scholars Ivan Bialostosky, Eric Hough, and Hilary Oman, also contributed to the research and development of this study.

## METHOD

In order to gather quantitative data, a survey was sent to 575 Penn State University undergraduates (after eliminating cross-organizational members) in the following organizations or designations:

- Alpha Phi Omega, a co-ed service fraternity
- Male campus residents in a special living option residence hall (Living-Learning Environment)
- SAIL, a Schreyer Honors College service organization
- ACT, a Schreyer Honors College organization for one-time service opportunities
- Alpha Xi Delta, a sorority
- Omicron Delta Kappa, a leadership honors society
- The Intrafraternity Council/Panhellenic Executive Board
- The Schreyer Honors College Scholar Assistants (student leaders and programmers)

Forty-two responses were received, a response rate of seven percent. Although no formal survey question addressed demographics, the respondents were mostly between the ages of 18 and 24, with roughly equal numbers of males and females.

Fifteen Penn State University undergraduates and graduate students participated in qualitative data collection. These participants were between the ages of 19 and 23. There were 9 females and 6 males. All interviewees were active participants and leaders in service.

The Service Leadership Survey (Table 1), a simple six-question survey, was created for the purposes of this study. Questions were asked regarding participation in service and service leadership during each year of the undergraduate career. Participants were asked to respond with both the raw numbers of service activities as well as the organizations in which they were involved.

### Procedure

The Service Leadership Survey was distributed by electronic mail to all participants, who were asked to complete the survey and send responses via e-mail. After each participant was asked to describe the general service and leadership activities per year as an undergraduate, each was then asked to give definitions of service and service leadership.

Table 1: Service Leadership Survey

When answering the survey, please note that "service organizations" and "service-oriented activities" include both university and non-university groups, and any organization in which a community of people (on or off-campus) is served. This can range from Habitat for Humanity to student government, or paid positions of service.
1) What year are you at PSU? a) 1st yr? b) 2nd yr? c) 3rd yr? d) 4th yr? e) 5th+ yr? f) graduate student or professional? (If you are a grad or professional who did your undergraduate work at Penn State, we'd appreciate your responses as they relate to your undergraduate experience only)
2) In how many "one-time" service activities (MLK Day of Service, PNC Day of Caring, etc.) did you participate during your: a) 1 <sup>st</sup> yr? B) 2nd yr? c) 3rd yr? d) 4th yr? e) 5th+ yr?
3) In how many service organizations or service-oriented activities were you an ACTIVE member during your: a) 1 <sup>st</sup> yr? B) 2nd yr? c) 3rd yr? d) 4th yr? e) 5th+ yr?
4) In how many service organizations or service-oriented activities did you hold a leadership role during your: a) 1 <sup>st</sup> yr? B) 2nd yr? c) 3rd yr? d) 4th yr? e) 5th+ yr?
5) In how many service programs or service activities, etc., did you participate during: a) summer break(s)? b) fall break(s)? c) winter break(s)? d) spring break(s)?
6) List the activities (both "one-time" and long-term) in which you have participated, according to each year in school. a) 1 <sup>st</sup> yr? B) 2nd yr? c) 3rd yr? d) 4th yr? e) 5th+ yr?

### Data Analysis

Mean and standard deviations for each year in school, including data from each class,<sup>2</sup> were calculated using Excel. Survey responses for one-time activities and general organizations were added together, and the mean was calculated for the combined number, as well as for the "service leadership" question.

Analysis of qualitative data involved a grounded theory approach of reviewing and coding interview transcripts to identify patterns and develop these patterns into distinct tracks of service leadership.

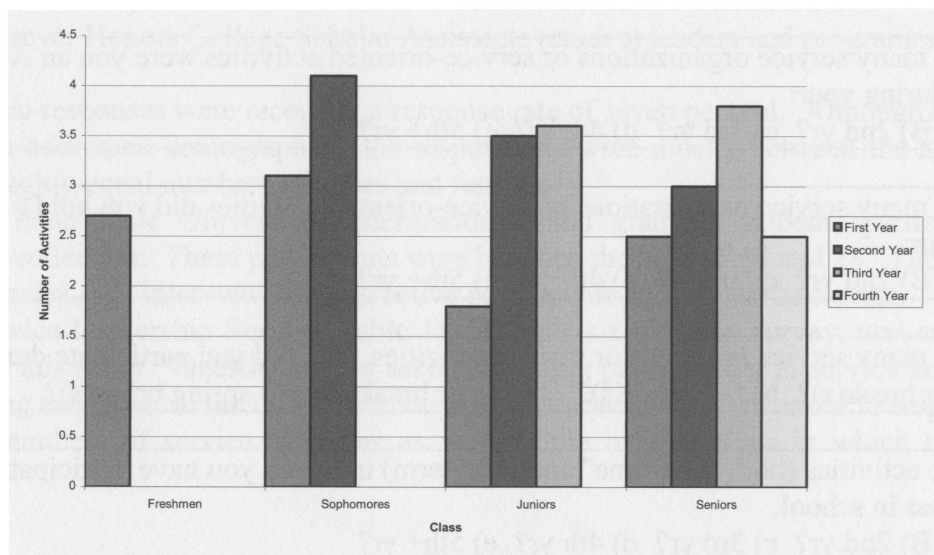
In examining the quantitative data, focus was placed on two main areas of service involvement: general participation in service as a *member* of a group, and more involved participation as a *leader*.

The first aspect examined was average service involvement by class. Figure 1 shows levels of general participation, without focusing on any leadership positions. It is important to note trends rather than raw numbers. Because many survey respondents listed no service

<sup>2</sup> From this point, *class* shall refer to the student's current year designation (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, senior +) and *year* refers to the year in which they participated in service (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, or 5<sup>th</sup>).

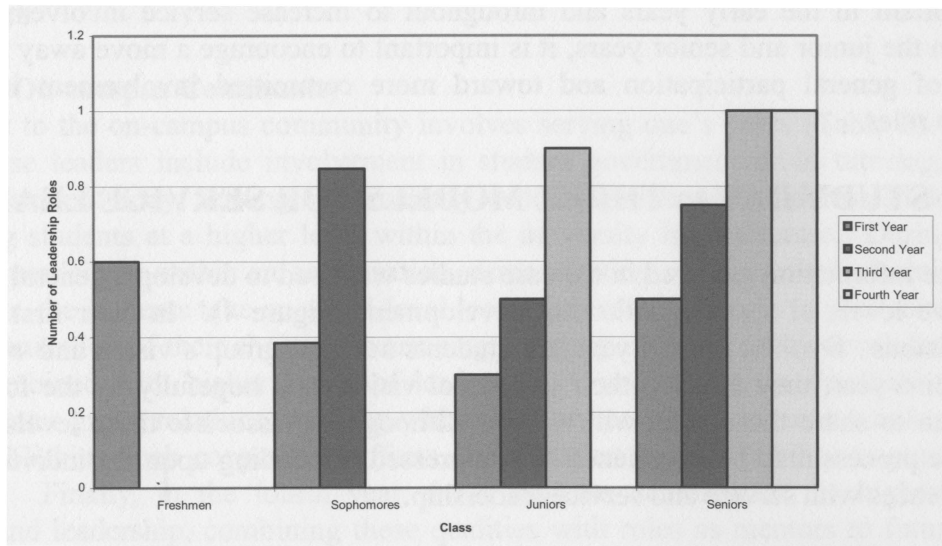
involvement across the board, the averages may seem low, but the researchers were more interested in four-year trends than actual numbers. The first and most obvious trend presented in Figure 1 is the steady increase in service involvement each year. As a student progresses from a first-year student to a sophomore and from a sophomore to a junior, he or she tends to participate in more and more activities. In addition, there is a slight drop in involvement in the senior year. Two possible explanations for this trend are the following: First, seniors have new concerns (e.g., seeking employment or entrance to graduate/professional school), so it is possible that the increased responsibilities of being a senior took up time that would otherwise be spent in service. Alternatively, it is possible that seniors did not do less service at all, but rather participated in more “specialized service”; in other words, they became more intensely involved in a group (particularly as a leader), instead of being only a member of many groups. Further evidence described below supports this theory of “senior specialization.”

*Figure 1: Average Service Involvement by Class*



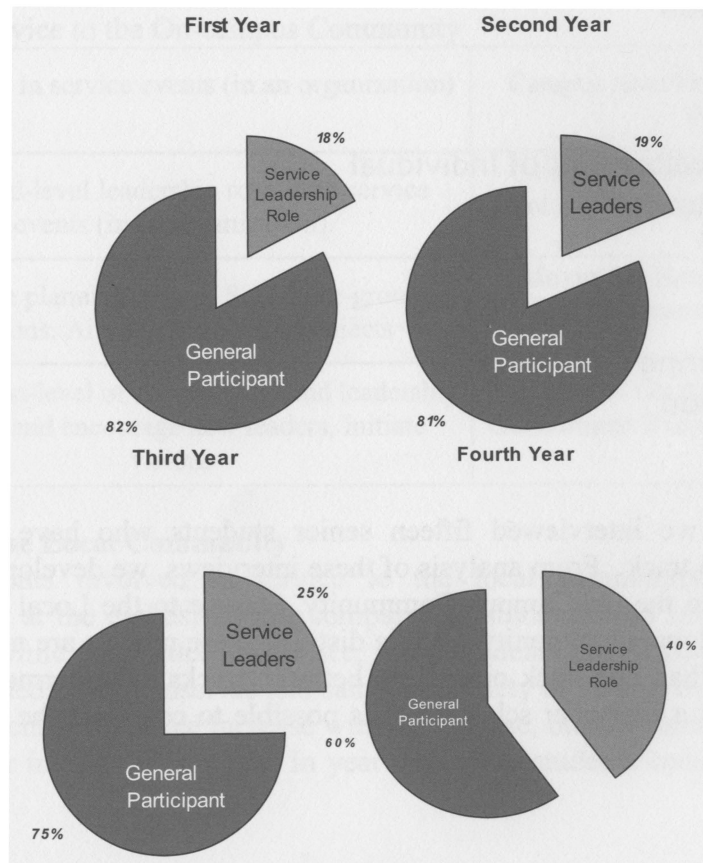
The next aspect examined was service leadership and how it might have evolved over a four-year period. Figure 2 depicts average service leadership roles by class. Once again, service involvement as a leader increased each year over the four years. There is also evidence for the “senior specialization” theory. Although, as discussed previously, overall involvement dropped in the senior year, leadership involvement actually increased in the senior year. Another interesting trend may be called the “junior plateau”: service involvement appears to be at maximum level during the junior year. Although seniors continue with service, the sharp increases associated with the first year and sophomore year are not apparent. This “plateau” may have resulted because juniors and seniors were moving more into leadership commitments instead of general involvement.

Figure 2: Average Service Leadership Roles by Class



Trends in general service participation vs. service leadership are presented in Figure 3, which shows the percentage of leadership roles compared to general participation over the four years. Service leadership roles increase each year relative to general membership roles. On average, by the time students are seniors, almost half of their service involvement will be in the form of service leadership.

Figure 3: Percentage of Service and Service Leadership Roles by Class



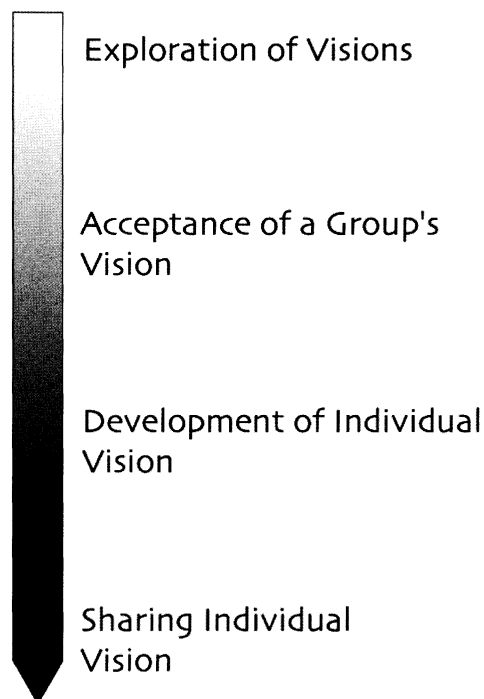


Two points from this quantitative analysis are applied to the tracks detailed below. First, it is important in the early years and throughout to increase service involvement each year. Second, in the junior and senior years, it is important to encourage a move away from increased amounts of general participation and toward more committed involvement in the form of leadership roles.

### **CASE STUDY DATA: THREE MODELS FOR SERVICE LEADERSHIP**

The information gathered in the case studies was used to develop a general framework for consecutive levels of service leadership development (Figure 4). In their first year, students explore visions. By their second year, the students accept a group's vision and work towards it. In their third year, they develop their individual vision, and hopefully by the fourth year they have begun to share that vision with others. Although we associate these levels with years in school, the process may be lengthened or compressed, depending upon the individual and his or her experiences with service and service leadership.

Figure 4: Framework for levels of service leadership development



For case study data, we interviewed fifteen senior students who have successfully completed a service leadership track. From analysis of these interviews, we developed and offer three distinct tracks: Service to the On-Campus Community, Service to the Local Community, and Service to the National/Global Community. While distinct, these models are not exclusive; students can engage in more than one track or overlap between tracks. Furthermore, although these models are proposed for a four-year schedule, it is possible to condense the four steps—



each consisting of one year—into a shorter length of time, or to extend the steps over a longer career of service.

### **Service to the On-campus Community**

Service to the on-campus community involves serving one's peers (Table 2). Frequent choices of these leaders include involvement in student government or in tutoring, planning events for the student body, serving on university-wide committees that address student issues, or representing students at a higher level within the university infrastructure. During the first year, students participate within an organization, demonstrating some level of commitment. In the second year, the students take on a mid-level leadership role and begin to plan service events within the organization of their choice. Overseeing planning events is a key development in the third year, combined with higher levels of leadership. Furthermore, in the third year these students seek inter-group relations, working with other service organizations towards a common goal. By establishing such cooperative efforts, these leaders gain the ability to pursue larger-scale projects. Finally, in the fourth year, these students demonstrate the highest level of commitment and leadership, combining these qualities with roles as mentors to future leaders. Also crucial to this phase of leadership is the sharing and initiation of individual visions as service activities and projects.

Like many students who choose this track, our case study selected student government as her mode of service. In her first year, she became involved in her residence area government, comprising a group of residence halls. In year two, she took on the highest leadership position in that local organization, and she began to volunteer with other organizations. In year three, she became involved in the all-campus area government and moved up in terms of overseeing events. Finally, in her fourth year, she held the highest level of commitment and leadership, which has allowed her to initiate new visions.

Table 2: Service to the On-campus Community

Year 1	Participate in service events (in an organization)	Campus Area Government Treasurer, Movin' On Volunteer (general)
Year 2	Take mid-level leadership role, Plan service events (in an organization)	Campus Area Government President, Movin' On Volunteer (hospitality), All-Campus Government Council Member
Year 3	Oversee planning events, Seek inter-group relations, Aim for large-scale projects	Movin' On Hospitality Committee Leader, All-Campus Government Treasurer and Fundraising Co-chair
Year 4	Hold highest-level of commitment and leadership, Mentor and encourage new leaders, Initiate visions	Movin' On Assistant Director, All-Campus Government Executive Vice President and Elections Commissioner

### **Service to the Local Community**

Students involved in service to the local community show the highest level of commitment at the earliest stages, compared to students who select the other tracks (Table 3). Moreover, while committed to service, these students are flexible in alternating the groups to which they dedicate themselves and sample a variety of service organization choices. The depth of commitment and service increase with each phase, but the students may shift their focus from one group or interest to another. In year one, these students commit to and participate in many

one-time service events and service organization(s). Students expand their roles as participants during the second year and take a leadership role in community outreach as well. Year three reveals these students to be leaders of already established projects and creators of new initiatives. Similar to the previously described on-campus model, the institution of inter-group relations expands the service ability of the students and the scope of that service. Besides seeking cooperative efforts, these students also search for gaps in service or try to discover unmet needs of the community. Such efforts translate to action in year four, as these students lead proactively, not only in improving existing projects but in thinking large-scale and applying their expertise to new areas of service. These new applications emphasize that students in this track of service shift their focus among different community service efforts while increasing the depth of their commitment. This shift in the last year may provide a clue to the survey data, which indicates that fourth-year students engage in fewer service activities than younger students. Such a seeming decrease in service may result from the extra level of commitment fourth-year students show to a select number of organizations, drawing their efforts from many organizations to concentrate on one or two that are especially in need of leadership. Again, the efforts of student leaders to act as mentors during their fourth years are vital to a healthy community service organization.

Our case-study student became very involved during his first year. In year two, he took on a leadership role as coordinator of “Into the Streets,” a service program comprising a series of one-day activities, and he also became a United Way student representative; both of these activities involved off-campus service. In year three, he began to initiate new projects, such as “Fresh Start”—a one-day service program for first-year students held at the beginning of the fall semester—and the Council of Lionhearts—a consortium of service organization leaders. In year four, he began to initiate new visions, thinking larger-scale, and to apply his expertise to new areas as he applied for a grant for a local service day for high school students; he also shifted to become a leader in his fraternity.

Table 3: Service to the Local Community

Year 1	Commit to and continually participate in many one-time activities, and some service organizations	Into the Streets Team Leader, many one-time service activities
Year 2	Expand participatory role, Take on leadership role in community outreach	Into the Streets Overall Coordinator, many one-time service activities, United Way Student Representative
Year 3	Lead established projects, Create new initiatives, Seek connections between groups, Discover gaps in service	Into the Streets Overall Coordinator, United Way Student Representative, Initiated Fresh Start, Council of Lionhearts
Year 4	Mentor new leaders, Lead proactively, Improve existing projects, Think large-scale, Apply expertise to new areas	Aimed to improve Student Day as Coordinator, Earned Grant for local service day, Philanthropy Chair for Fraternity

### Service to the National/Global Community

Service to the National/Global Community is the track most tightly linked to self-exploration and to curricular choices. Also, fall/spring/summer breaks are very important in the pursuit of national or global service, because those are the times convenient for students to travel to engage in non-local service.

Unlike participants in the other models, students following this track spend the first year exploring projects and themselves in determining where they want to invest their time, with the result being a lower level of initial commitment. In year two, these students commit to outreach organizations and are already formulating a bigger picture, delving into where they fit in the worldwide scheme of service. After the explorative phases of years one and two, year three consists of students sharing their worldwide vision and directing their involvement in a local leadership role that reflects this ambition. Moreover, students use the experiences of leadership and sharing in this phase to prepare themselves for their chosen mode of service. Finally, fourth-year students in this model act out their visions in national or global service and apply the experience they gain to create new venues for service.

A sociology major, the student case study was experimenting in her first year, as she was a member of several organizations and participating in the groups' activities. In her second year, she remained a member of the same organizations, but she also began to develop a bigger picture and to expand beyond the local community, traveling to New York City to work with the homeless. In year three she studied in Thailand, where she was a protester, translator, teacher, and organizer of some outreach activities. In year four she brought the experience back, developing a national non-profit organization to promote service after study abroad, showing that she is using the experience she gained to create new channels of service involvement for other students.

Table 4: Service to the National/Global Community

Year 1	Explore project and self through one-time outreach initiatives (locally)	Students for a Free Tibet Organizer, Amnesty International
Year 2	Commit to outreach organizations, Explore beyond immediate community, Develop "Bigger Picture"	Students for a Free Tibet, Amnesty International, Spring break trip to NYC to work with homeless
Year 3	Take leadership role locally, Share larger message, Prepare for more national/global participation and service	In Thailand: Assembly of the Poor Protester, Translator, English teacher, Prepared American Outreach activities
Year 4	Act in national/global service, Apply experience gained to create new "channels" for service	Developer of national non-profit to promote grass-roots service after study abroad

### Relationship of Case Study Tracks to Vision Growth

All of these tracks follow the vision development trend introduced earlier (see Figure 4 and Table 5), in that in the first year, students explore visions, by exploring what they themselves want and then trying to match their interests with the service activities and organizations available. The second phase of all models correlates to commitment to an organization's vision, followed by an expanded individual vision inspired by or based on the organizational vision in the third year. Finally, in stage four, student leaders in service mentor others and augment their service repertoire, indicating that they share their vision with others.

Table 5: Patterns of Engagement in Service Leadership: First Year to Senior Year

Track	Service to the On-Campus Community	Service to the Local Community	Service to the National/Global Community
Year 1	Participate in service events (in an organization)	Commit to and continually participate in many one-time activities, and some service organizations	Explore project and self through one-time outreach initiatives (locally)
Year 2	Take mid-level leadership role, Plan service events (in an organization)	Expand participatory role, Take on leadership role in community outreach	Commit to outreach organizations, Explore beyond immediate community, Develop "Bigger Picture"
Year 3	Oversee planning events, Seek inter-group relations, Aim for large-scale projects	Lead established projects, Create new initiatives, Seek connections between groups, Discover gaps in service	Take leadership role locally, Share larger message, Prepare for more national/global participation and service
Year 4	Hold highest-level of commitment and leadership, Mentor and encourage new leaders, Initiate visions	Mentor new leaders, Lead proactively, Improve existing projects, Think large-scale, Apply expertise to new areas	Act in national/global service, Apply experience gained to create new "channels" for service

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RELATED STUDIES

This paper offers interpretations and conclusions from a very small pilot study conducted in the spring of 2001, but the researchers are hoping to expand the study, using a larger sample of students. The study did not start with any preconceived notions of models for service leadership, but rather used a grounded-theory approach to discover if there was a trajectory. The qualitative case studies were particularly illuminating, as the models discussed above emerged from the experiences of the students who were interviewed.

It is important to specify the questions that were not asked. There was no explicit effort in this project to understand why people do service, nor was there an attempt to assess intellectual or developmental growth in terms of values or other characteristics resulting from service activities. Delve, Mintz, and Stewart (1990) have addressed these issues. Their model includes five phases; it is consistent with what we found, but asks slightly different questions. Their five phases—exploration, clarification, realization, activation, and internalization—could be accomplished in one year, or spread out over a five- or six-year period of student development which may or may not coincide with an undergraduate education, as some students have significant service activities in high school and may come to college at the third or fourth stage of Delve et al. (1990). In the exploration phase, they found that students were committed to their own interests and self-development, and the outcome was self-satisfaction; they may be motivated by a tangible incentive such as a pizza party or t-shirt. In the clarification phase, they found that students became committed to a group, and the outcome was a sense of belonging to that group. In the third phase, students became committed to an issue as they became more involved over a longer period of time, and the outcome was a sense of understanding of an issue to which they were making a commitment. In the activation phase, they continued that commitment to an issue, with the outcome that they were empowered to make change, not only in their own lives, but also in the larger community. There is a continuity between phases three

and four, but it is much more intense and turns outward in the fourth phase. In the internalization phase, students redefined their moral sphere, such that their commitment was to social justice, and the developmental outcome was a sense of living one's own values. The researchers felt that what they had discovered through case-study interviews was consistent with Delve, Mintz, and Stewart's (1990) study.

It is hoped as this work continues, that it is not only descriptive but that it can help students understand their growth and put it in context with other students' growth, not only at Penn State but across the country as we look at other studies. It is important for students to realize that it is not necessary to continue doing more if they want to contribute, but that they can participate in a deeper way. In that latest stage, students often join advisory boards at Penn State, so that many students become part of community-wide teams that are also trying to set goals and visions for the university and local community, and that is definitely a service leadership role.

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## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES**

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