Student Leadership Needs:

Results from the
2018 Student Life Survey

Center for the Study of Student Life

April 2018

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
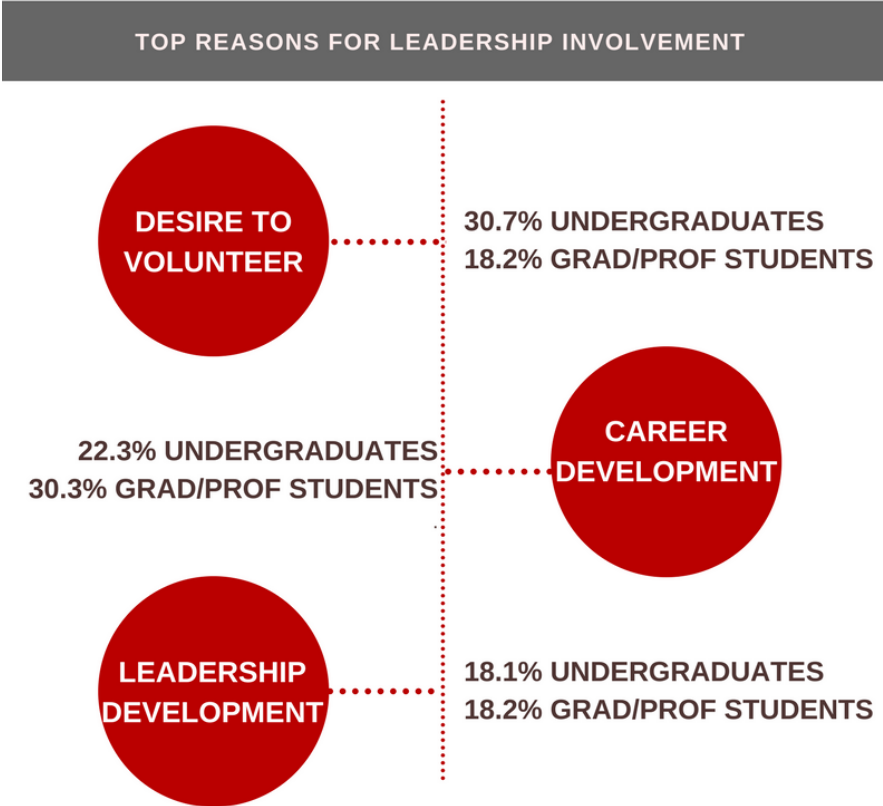
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores campus leadership involvement and self-identified areas of skill confidence and growth among students at The Ohio State University. In particular, this report focuses on both past leadership experiences and desired leadership experiences, as well as students' beliefs about their leadership skills and abilities. Data from this report are from the 2018 Student Life Survey, which includes a random sample of undergraduate and graduate students on the Columbus campus ($N = 1,357$).

45%
of students are officers in at least one student organization

- The most common leadership activity on campus was serving as an officer in a student organization for both undergraduate students (**44.8%**) and graduate/ professional students (**44.0%**). The second most common activity for undergraduate students was completing required leadership trainings or workshops (**31.2**%). For graduate/professional students, the second most common activity was completing voluntary leadership trainings or workshops (**25.5**%).

- When asked about future leadership plans, undergraduate students wanted to get involved as leaders in student organizations (**49.8%**) or Greek life (**17.1%**), while graduate/professional students desired to lead via teaching classes (**29.9%**) and becoming community activists (**20.1%**).

- Respondents had the highest skill-related confidence for problem-solving (**83.2%** confident on average) and setting goals (**83.0%** confident on average) and the lowest amount of confidence for obtaining support (**75.4%** confident on average) and obtaining resources (**75.4%** confident on average).

- Both undergraduate (**44.2%**) and graduate/professional students (**46.9%**) indicated that they would like to greatly improve on obtaining resources as leaders. Graduate/professional students also indicated that they would like to greatly improve on obtaining support as leaders (**45.7%**), while undergraduate students reported the need to greatly improve upon developing relationships as leaders (**44.4%**).

Reasons for Involvement

TOP REASONS FOR LEADERSHIP INVOLVEMENT

DESIRE TO VOLUNTEER

30.7% UNDERGRADUATES
18.2% GRAD/PROF STUDENTS

22.3% UNDERGRADUATES
30.3% GRAD/PROF STUDENTS

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

18.1% UNDERGRADUATES
18.2% GRAD/PROF STUDENTS

- The top two reasons to become involved as leaders for both undergraduates and graduate/professional students were desire (e.g., passion, to support certain causes) and career development. Following these reasons, students cited leadership skill development and requirements of the programs they were in as reasons to get involved as leaders at Ohio State.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

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INTRODUCTION

This report explores students' leadership development at The Ohio State University. In particular, this report focuses on past and future leadership experiences, the current state of students' leadership skill development and their desired future leadership skill development. The report also explores leadership self-efficacy, or belief in one's capacity to lead. Students identified their current skills as leaders as well as where they would like to improve. Thus, this report summarizes an assessment of student leadership needs as well.

Involvement in college is associated with increased sense of belonging, retention and academic success (Tinto, 2006-2007; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). Specifically, involvement in leadership positions is associated with social responsibility (Foreman & Retallick, 2012; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001) and relationship development (Miles, 2010). Moreover, self-efficacy is related to goal choice; the higher an individual's self-efficacy, the more likely they will attempt a related goal (Bandura, 1982). Students with greater leadership self-efficacy are more likely to attempt goals that require leadership skills and abilities.

The information in this report is organized into three sections. The first section explores the kinds of leadership activities and trainings undergraduate and graduate/professional students are currently involved in as well as activities that graduate/professional students were involved in during their undergraduate education. The second section focuses on students' leadership self-efficacy. In particular, this section provides a snapshot of students' self-efficacy for leadership as well as explores differences between certain groups regarding their leadership self-efficacy (e.g., racial/ethnic groups). The third section contains data related to areas of leadership in which students indicated they would like to improve.

METHODS

Data for this needs assessment come from the 2018 Student Life Survey. The Student Life Survey is administered annually by the Center for the Study of Student Life to examine trends in student engagement and sense of belonging, as well as to improve institutional practices and to address current issues affecting students at Ohio State.

The 2018 Student Life Survey was administered to random samples of 4,000 undergraduate students and 3,000 graduate and professional students on the Columbus campus during Spring semester. A total of 1,357 students responded to the survey, for an overall response rate of 19.4%. The response rate was 18.3% among undergraduate students and 20.8% among graduate and professional students. See Appendix A for a summary of respondents' demographic and academic characteristics.

When asked about leadership activities that students were involved in, options included: leadership conferences, leadership courses, leadership retreats, required leadership trainings/workshops, voluntary leadership trainings/workshops, officer positions in a student organization and supervisory positions at work. In addition, for undergraduate students, leadership capstone projects were included. For graduate/professional students, leadership certificate programs were included.

When students answered questions about their leadership self-efficacy and skills, they were given a definition of a "leader." The following is the exact text students saw regarding the definition of a leader: "Please think of the term leader broadly to mean 'someone who participates fully as a member of a group attempting to accomplish positive change.' In other words, try not to think of leadership as a formal position, but rather think of leadership as a process of trying to accomplish a goal with a group."

General leadership self-efficacy was measured via a Likert scale with *1 = Strongly disagree* to *5 = Strongly agree* (e.g., "I have the ability to lead a group to accomplish its task."). This scale was adapted from a leadership self-efficacy scale published in the literature (Murphy, 1992). Since there are multiple components that make up one's leadership ability, specific aspects of leadership self-efficacy were also measured. Individuals indicated their confidence in their ability to carry out each aspect (e.g., delegating tasks, communication, motivating others, planning for the future). These questions were measured on 0-100% confidence scales. This scale is referred to as the Leadership Skills Confidence Scale. A Leadership Skills Improvement Scale used the same component parts as the Leadership Skills Confidence Scale to measure students' areas of desired improvement on a scale from *1 = Do not see a need to improve at all* to *5 = Would like to improve a great amount*. Please note that the survey instrument used for all data analyses contained in this report is copyrighted. All rights reserved. For information on use and adaptation of this survey instrument, please contact The Center for the Study of Student Life at The Ohio State University. Any reproduction, use, display, making derivative works, and/or distribution of this material without the express written permission of The Ohio State University is strictly prohibited.
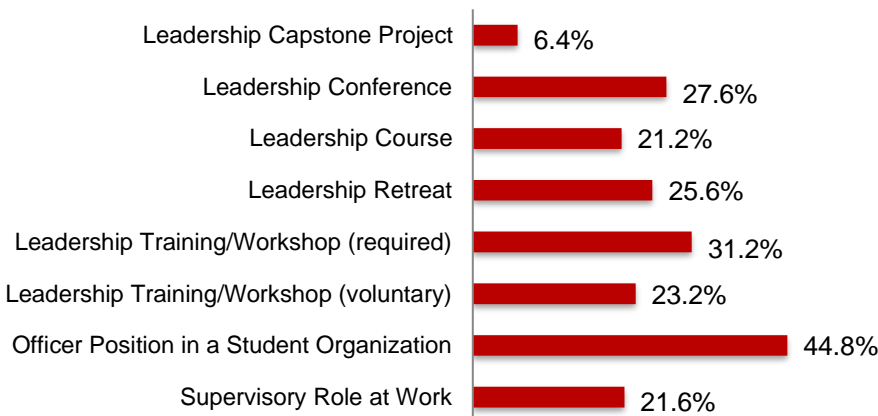
FINDINGS

This section discusses the main research findings. The findings are broken down into three sections. The first summarizes the types of leadership activities in which current undergraduate students and graduate/professional students engage, as well as the types of leadership activities that a summary of both undergraduate and graduate/professionals students' perceptions of leadership self-efficacy. The third section contains a summary of skills in which students would like to improve as well as the types of leadership experiences they would like to have in the future.

PAST AND PRESENT LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Of the 608 undergraduate students who responded to the question, 250 (41.1%) reported being involved in any leadership-related activities (e.g., a leadership conference, a required or voluntary leadership training, etc.). The most common leadership activity among undergraduate students was participating as an officer in a student organization (44.8%). The least common leadership activity among undergraduate students was a leadership capstone project (6.4%).

Undergraduate Student Leadership Activity Involvement
(*n* = 250)

Activity	Percentage
Leadership Capstone Project	6.4%
Leadership Conference	27.6%
Leadership Course	21.2%
Leadership Retreat	25.6%
Leadership Training/Workshop (required)	31.2%
Leadership Training/Workshop (voluntary)	23.2%
Officer Position in a Student Organization	44.8%
Supervisory Role at Work	21.6%

Students had an opportunity to write in other leadership activities in which they were currently involved. Some of the most common "other" activities included: Buck-I-SERV leader, captain of a sports team, peer leader in a campus organization, taking the lead on group projects in courses and religious or spiritual leadership positions.

Undergraduate students were also asked to provide reasons why they engaged in leadership activities. Below are common themes that arose from these open-ended responses and a sampling of verbatim comments that encompass each theme.
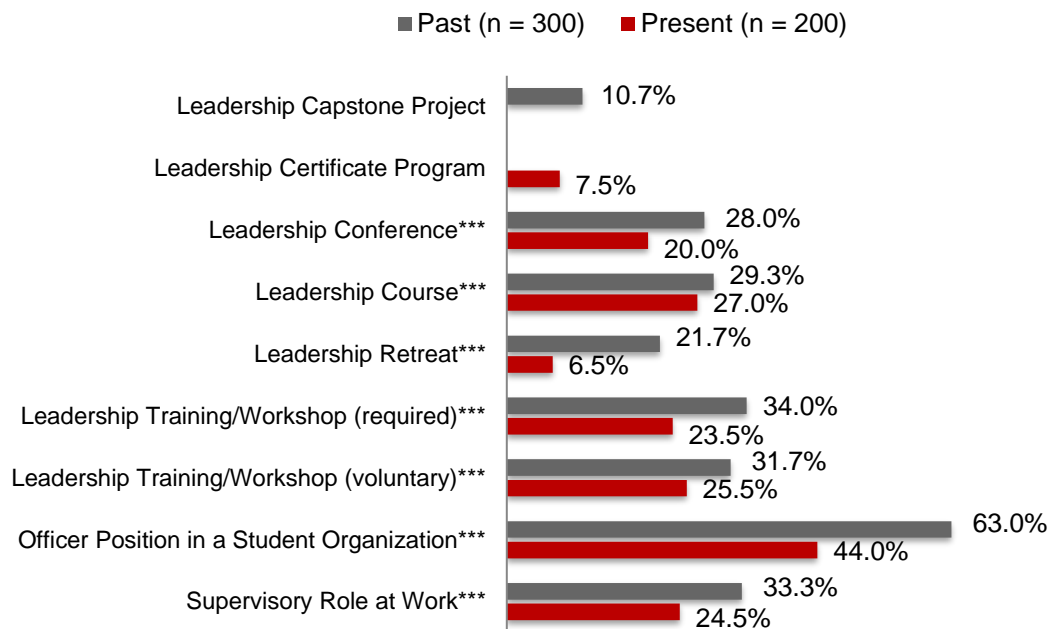
Undergraduates' Reasons for Engagement in Leadership Activities (*n* = 166)
Desire to Volunteer (*n* = 51); 30.7%
▪ I'm passionate about serving my community and providing ways for international students and Americans to connect and communicate in a respectful, open, and welcoming environment. In addition to wanting to serve those with lower incomes to get medical car[e]
▪ Some of it was required, but most of it was all voluntary and fun
▪ They are causes I support and want to see furthered so I stepped up
Career Development (*n* = 37); 22.3%
▪ I enjoy responsibility and being held accountable to my peers. I am encouraged by friends and family. Leadership roles have been influential for my career development and have allowed me to get a full time position at my dream job.
▪ I took the leadership course for career development purposes
▪ Leadership activities are a good way to get involved more on campus while enhancing personal skills that can become relevant in a career some day.
Leadership Skill Development (*n* = 30); 18.1%
▪ I chose to be a part of this program because it was early arrival on campus and I wanted to move in early. I also believed it would look good on a resume and allow me to build skills as an individual to become a better leader.
▪ I understand that leadership is not something that you learn and then know for the rest of your life. It needs to continuously be practiced and learned for it to stay effective. What may have worked in one scenario of leadership may not be the best for an[other]
▪ To build myself as a leader
Requirement (*n* = 27); 16.3%
▪ Being a leader in my organization required me to participate in several leadership trainings and retreats.
▪ [It] was important for my training as Vice President of Philanthropy
▪ One was required [...]
Résumé Building (*n* = 18); 10.8%
▪ To better my resume and because I liked the club a lot and wanted to have my own influence in what we do as a club and lead/plan activities
▪ To build my resume and leadership experience as well as to stay intimately involved in the organization that I participated in.

Of the 517 graduate/professional students that responded to the question about leadership activities, 300 (58.0%) reported involvement in leadership-related activities during their undergraduate career (e.g., leadership conferences, required or voluntary leadership trainings, etc.). A total of 524 students responded to a similar item inquiring about leadership-related activities in graduate/professional school. A total of 200 (38.2%) students reported involvement in leadership-related activities in graduate/professional school. During graduate/professional students' undergraduate years, the most common leadership activity was serving as an officer in a student organization (63.0%) and the least common leadership activity was a leadership-

related capstone project (10.7%). For graduate/professional students' current leadership activities, the most common was serving as an officer in a student organization (44.0%), which matched the proportion of current undergraduate students serving as officers, and the least common leadership activity was leadership retreats (6.5%). Graduate/professional students were significantly more likely to engage in many types of leadership activities in college than in graduate/professional school (i.e., leadership conferences, courses, retreats, trainings/workshops, officer positions and supervisory roles at work).

Graduate/Professional Student Leadership Activity Involvement

■ Past (n = 300) ■ Present (n = 200)

Activity	Past	Present
Leadership Capstone Project	10.7%	
Leadership Certificate Program		7.5%
Leadership Conference***	28.0%	20.0%
Leadership Course***	29.3%	27.0%
Leadership Retreat***	21.7%	6.5%
Leadership Training/Workshop (required)***	34.0%	23.5%
Leadership Training/Workshop (voluntary)***	31.7%	25.5%
Officer Position in a Student Organization***	63.0%	44.0%
Supervisory Role at Work***	33.3%	24.5%

Note. "Leadership Capstone Project" was only a possible selection when graduate/professional students were considering their involvement during their undergraduate years. "Leadership Certificate Program" was only a possible selection when graduate/professional students were considering their current leadership involvement in graduate/professional school.

Graduate and professional students also had an opportunity to write in other leadership activities of which they have been a part. Some of the most common "other" activities included: captain or coach of a sports team, teaching courses, mentoring, group project leadership roles, presenting at conferences and university-related service positions (e.g., assisting with accreditation, creating course curricula or competencies, leading research related to academic service, etc.).

Graduate and professional students were also asked to provide reasons why they engaged in such leadership activities. Below are common themes that arose from these open-ended responses and a sampling of verbatim comments that encompass each theme.

Graduate/Professional Students' Reasons for Engagement in Leadership Activities (*n* = 66)
Career Development (*n* = 20); 30.3%
▪ This was for career development, I was also trained by my advisor to take on this role, and I feel it has helped me develop as a researcher.
▪ Career and leadership skill development and passionate about increasing awareness of specific club.

Desire to Volunteer (*n* = 12); 18.2%
▪ I did this voluntarily. I created a student organization for graduate students.
▪ I enjoy being involved and like leading groups of individuals

Leadership Skill Development (*n* = 12); 18.2%
▪ I took a leadership and coaching course that was an elective of my program. I took it because I wanted to learn how to better lead a group of people.
▪ Some training was required, some was voluntary because I wanted to serve and contribute to my department, while enhancing my skills and building my CV.
▪ I believed it would strengthen my role as a leader

Requirement (*n* = 12); 18.2%
▪ It was a requirement for the officer position of the organization.
▪ It was part of my job

Saw Need (*n* = 8); 12.1%
▪ Because I believed in the group's mission/focus, and wanted to further it.
▪ The organization needed me to step up and assume the position so that they could maintain active status with the university. I also viewed it as an opportunity to build my resume and network with other members of the group.
▪ Some of the organizations [I]'m apart of had been struggling with leadership. I wanted to know how to take that struggle and turn it into a successful organization by being a good leader.

LEADERSHIP SELF-EFFICACY

The following table illustrates the proportion of students who either agreed or strongly agreed with items assessing leadership self-efficacy. Leadership self-efficacy results were similar for undergraduate students compared to graduate and professional students, so the aggregated data is presented in this report.

Fewer than half of respondents (41.4%) believed they knew more than their peers about how to be a good leader. Almost 90% of students believed they had the ability to lead a group to accomplish its task, could encourage a group to work towards goals that benefit the common good and could allow most members to contribute to tasks while leading. Fewer students (57.7%) believed they could use conflict as a learning opportunity as a leader or that they could engage their group in actions that improved the community at large (69.8%).

Leadership Self-Efficacy	% Agree/Strongly Agree
I can encourage a group to work towards goals that benefit the common good. (*n* = 1,123)	88.7%
I have the ability to lead a group to accomplish its task. (*n* = 1,122)	88.1%
I have the capability to allow most group members to contribute to tasks when leading a group. (*n* = 1,121)	85.7%
I am confident in my ability to influence a group I lead. (*n* = 1,121)	78.1%
I know how to develop a shared vision for a group I lead. (*n* = 1,123)	75.8%
I can engage my group in actions that improve our local or regional community. (*n* = 1,124)	69.8%
I am able to use conflict as a development opportunity for a group of peers I am leading. (*n* = 1,126)	57.7%
I know a lot more than most of my peers about what it takes to be a	41.4%

good leader. (*n* = 1,120)

The following table illustrates the percent confidence that students reported having in regards to specific leadership skills, called the Leadership Skills Confidence Scale. Percent confidence numbers were similar for undergraduate students compared to graduate and professional students, so the aggregated data is presented in this report.

Students had a high level of confidence in coordinating tasks (82.0% confident on average), setting goals (83.0% confident on average) and problem solving (83.2% confident on average). However, students felt less confident in their ability to motivate others (76.8% confident on average), influence others (76.0% confident on average) or obtain resources or support (75.4% confident on average).

Leadership Skills Confidence Scale (0-100%)	*Mean*	*SD*
Problem solve (*n* = 1,169)	83.2%	15.87
Set goals (*n* = 1,168)	83.0%	16.60
Coordinate tasks and assignments (*n* = 1,168)	82.0%	17.36
Take initiative (*n* = 1,169)	81.1%	18.66
Plan for the future (*n* = 1,170)	81.0%	17.52
Communicate (*n* = 1,167)	80.9%	18.09
Delegate tasks (*n* = 1,168)	79.0%	18.21
Develop relationships (*n* = 1,170)	79.0%	19.96
Motivate others (*n* = 1,171)	76.8%	19.31
Influence others (*n* = 1,168)	76.0%	18.94
Obtain support (*n* = 1,170)	75.4%	19.69
Obtain resources (*n* = 1,169)	75.4%	18.99

Note. SD stands for standard deviation.

The following chart depicts differences on this scale among racial and ethnic groups. Certain groups significantly differed from other groups. Differences are summarized following the chart. Neither Hawaiian/Pacific Islander nor Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native were included in the analysis because there were fewer than 5 individuals who identified as these races/ethnicities. For the chart, overall percent confidence was calculated for each respondent by creating an individual overall average from their self-rated confidence on each item in the Leadership Skills Confidence Scale. This average confidence score for each respondent was then used to compute an overall average percent confidence for each racial and ethnic group.

Leadership Skills Confidence Scale
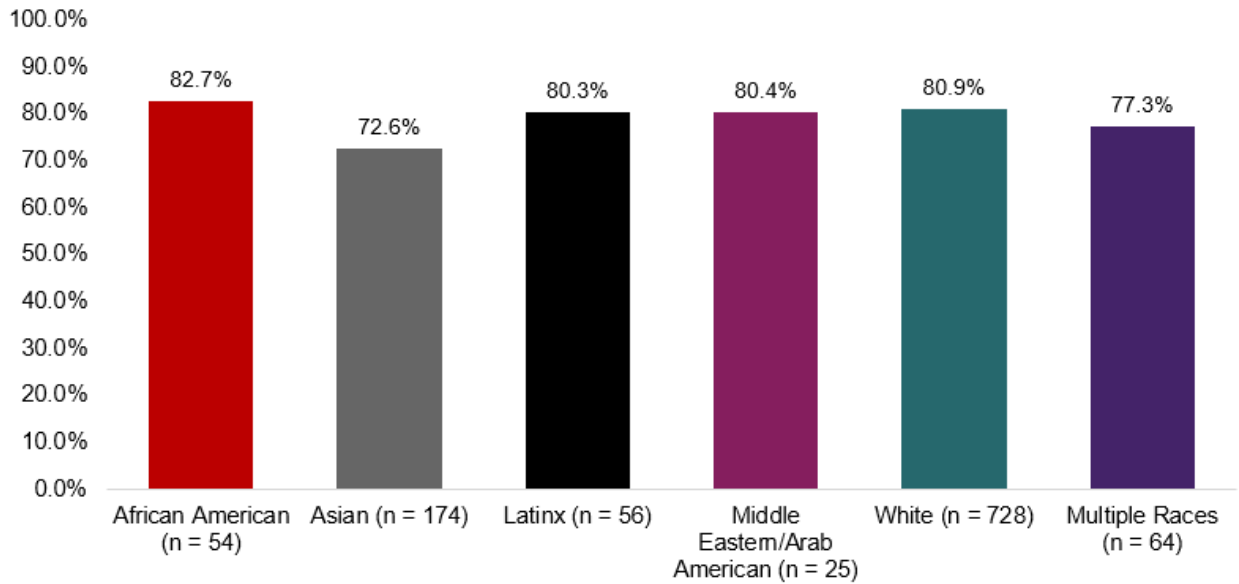
African American students had statistically significantly higher leadership skill confidence compared to Asian students and students who identified as multiple races or ethnicities. Asian American students had statistically significantly lower leadership skill confidence than Middle Eastern/Arab American students, Latinx students, African American students, white students and students identified as multiple races or ethnicities. No other pairs significantly differed from each other.

There were no significant differences in aggregate leadership skill confidence based on self-reported gender.

FUTURE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES AND SKILL IMPROVEMENT

The following section describes the types of leadership experiences and skills that students would like to have or improve on in the future.

Future Leadership Roles and Activities

Of the 583 undergraduate students that responded to the question, 401 (68.8%) reported planning to or wanting to take on additional leadership roles during their remaining college years. The following table summarizes the most common types of leadership activities these undergraduate students described as wanting to experience in the future. Below are common themes that arose from these open-ended responses and a sampling of verbatim comments that encompass each theme.

Undergraduates' Desired Future Leadership Activities (*n* = 321)
Student Organization (*n* = 160); 49.8%
▪ I would like to get more involved with my ASM club.
▪ I would like to become an officer in a student organization.
▪ I want to have a more active role in Empower Sports, I want to teach, and I want to join many other clubs that advocate for exceptional children.
Greek Life (*n* = 55); 17.1%
▪ I took the leadership course for career development purposes [] I would love to have a leadership role within my sorority. I miss the feeling of helping others and helping everyone

reach a positive and happy goal. I have a huge goal to be the president of our sorority senior year.

- Currently, I am in a leadership position in my fraternity, and I would like to continue to do that and rise in the ranks

At Work (*n* = 54); 16.8%

- Continue progressing up the ladder at work so I can be relied upon and also pass skills on to newer employees.
- I would like to be the Head Student Equipment Manager my senior year.

Peer Mentor (*n* = 44); 13.7%

- A peer mentor in my department.
- I think a peer mentor would be something I am most interested in taking on in the future. I do wish I would have started my college career here at Ohio State because I feel that has hurt me in getting involved and also feeling comfortable getting involved

Other (*n* = 36); 11.2%

- I would like to be named section leader of my section in the Athletic Band. I would also like to be an RA at some point as well as a member of the Health Science Scholars Leadership Council for at least a year.
- In my sport/with my team. In my church community, and the people I choose to spend my time with. I would like to be an influence for the people I teach, coach, and interact with in my daily lives.

Of the 500 graduate/professional students that responded to the question about if they would like to take on additional leadership roles in graduate or professional school, 288 (57.6%) reported wanting to take on additional leadership roles. The following table summarizes the most common types of leadership activities these graduate and professional students described as wanting to experience in the future. Below are common themes that arose from these open-ended responses and a sampling of verbatim comments that encompass each theme.

Graduate/Professional Students' Desired Future Leadership Activities (*n* = 194)

Teaching a Class (*n* = 58); 29.9%

- I would like to eventually teach at least one class and maybe take on a role in my department's graduate student association.
- I would love to be able to TA a class
- Teaching a class and managing lab. I totally love to teach!

Community Activism (*n* = 39); 20.1%

- I would like to get more involved with community activism and set up a long-standing community health service event that benefits the Columbus community, particularly those who are in greater need (the medically underserved).
- I plan to be a leader in the community, and leader in helping others improve their skills.
- I would like the opportunity to help my department (or other engineers more broadly) to interact more with the community. Much of our research is supported by federal grants (all of our taxes) and I think we should do a better job sharing our work […]

Student Organization (*n* = 39); 20.1%

- I would like to take on a greater leadership role in some of the research projects I work on. Furthermore, I would like to help out with an undergraduate club to provide any insight I have gained through the years.
- I am currently running for a leadership position on student council and am captain of a case competition team - these are my two current leadership roles in which I would like to expand and develop my skills.

- I would like to stay involved in the organizations in which I have current leadership positions, to ensure their future success.

At Work (*n* = 34); 17.5%

- Upper Management within my company.
- A supervisory role in my current professional job.

Peer Leadership (*n* = 26); 13.4%

- L[e]ading a team of my peers to accomplish a job related to our academic interest, but that also impacts the community. Also, developing tools for the community schools with my peers.
- I would like to be able to lead a group of students, like myself, through tasks successful. Whether it is for a job or for a project in school, I want to be able to have the confidence to lead.
- I would like to lead a team of peers to go for the same goal.

Future Skill Improvement

Below are tables describing skills that undergraduate students and graduate/professional students would like to improve in regards to leadership. The proportion of students who indicated that they would like to improve the skill "more than some" or "a great amount" is reported below. Skills are listed in the order of desired improvement magnitude.

Areas of Desired Skill Improvement – Undergraduates	% Selected "4" or "5 – Would like to improve a great amount"
Developing relationships (*n* = 579)	44.4%
Obtaining resources (*n* = 577)	44.2%
Influencing others (*n* = 579)	42.9%
Obtaining support (*n* = 578)	42.5%
Communicating (*n* = 579)	41.5%
Motivating others (*n* = 577)	41.4%
Planning for the future (*n* = 577)	40.4%
Taking initiative (*n* = 577)	39.7%
Problem solving (*n* = 579)	35.7%
Setting goals (*n* = 579)	35.1%
Coordinating tasks and assignments (*n* = 580)	33.3%
Delegating tasks (*n* = 577)	31.8%

Areas of Desired Skill Improvement – Graduate/Professional Students	% Selected "4" or "5 – Would like to improve a great amount"
Obtaining resources (*n* = 488)	46.9%
Obtaining support (*n* = 489)	45.7%
Motivating others (*n* = 489)	45.2%
Influencing others (*n* = 490)	44.5%
Developing relationships (*n* = 486)	43.8%
Communicating (*n* = 491)	42.8%
Delegating tasks (*n* = 486)	39.1%
Planning for the future (*n* = 486)	37.6%

Problem solving (*n* = 492)	37.0%
Taking initiative (*n* = 489)	36.8%
Setting goals (*n* = 488)	34.8%
Coordinating tasks and assignments (*n* = 488)	34.6%

CONCLUSION

This report summarized findings from the leadership needs assessment on the 2018 Student Life Survey. This summary provides a snapshot of student perceptions of their leadership experiences, self-efficacy and future areas of need (e.g., experiences and skills) on The Ohio State University Columbus campus.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

	Undergraduate		Graduate/Professional	
	n	Percent	*n*	Percent
Total	733	54.0%	624	46.0%
Gender				
Female	396	64.1%	253	56.2%
Male	215	34.8%	190	42.2%
Self-Defined	7	1.1%	7	1.6%
Race/Ethnicity				
White	489	68.4%	337	57.8%
Asian	89	12.4%	122	20.9%
Multiracial	42	5.9%	27	4.6%
African American/Black/African	39	5.5%	27	4.6%
Hispanic and/or Latinx	28	3.9%	33	5.7%
Middle Eastern/Arab American	12	1.7%	18	3.1%
Native American/American Indian	1	0.1%	1	0.2%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Other race	6	0.8%	5	0.9%
Prefer not to answer	9	1.3%	12	2.1%
First-Generation College Student				
Continuing generation	576	78.6%	501	96.3%
First generation	157	21.4%	23	3.7%
Citizenship				
Domestic student	680	92.8%	490	78.5%
International student	53	7.2%	134	21.5%
Age				
Traditional age (18-27)	702	95.8%	382	61.2%
Non-traditional age (28+)	31	4.2%	242	38.8%
Academic Level (by credit hours)				
First-year undergraduate	57	4.2%	--	--
Second-year undergraduate	166	12.2%	--	--
Third-year undergraduate	167	12.3%	--	--
Fourth-year+ undergraduate	339	25.0%	--	--
Graduate	--	--	494	36.4%
Professional	--	--	130	9.6%

Note. All data are from the Student Information System with the exception of gender and race/ethnicity, which were self-reported by the student on the survey instrument.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

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