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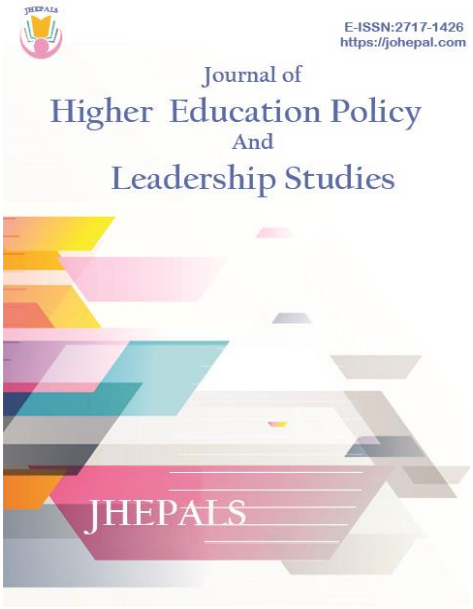
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Pathways to Involvement: The Role of Graduate Student Government in Leadership Learning

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Abstract

Student government is commonly seen as a way for students in U.S. higher education to engage in shared governance and develop leadership skills for future careers. However, this perspective often centers on undergraduate students and overlooks the role of graduate student populations. Graduate student government associations offer valuable opportunities for leadership development, helping graduate students build leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy. This article highlights the significance of student government involvement in fostering leadership growth. It also explores the experiences of the authors and three international graduate students who actively participated in graduate student government. Through their involvement, these students were able to strengthen their leadership abilities and gain meaningful experience that contributed to their personal and professional development. By focusing on graduate students, this article broadens the understanding of student government's role in higher education and emphasizes its potential to empower diverse student groups in their leadership journeys through aspects of leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy.

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Keywords: Graduate Student Government; Graduate Students; Student Government; International Students; Leadership

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Introduction

Registered student organizations such as sororities and fraternities, identity based organizations, academic based organizations, and social based organizations are commonly recognized as providing opportunities for cultivating leadership skills and personal growth, but the organizations that are most widely recognized for cultivating leadership are collegiate student governments (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Although traditionally student government organizations have been focused on undergraduate students, for institutions that have graduate student government organizations, there are chances to have the same transformational leadership learning opportunities. The purpose of this reflection article is to explore the transformative leadership opportunities provided by graduate student government organizations, highlighting their impact on leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy. Through an overview of graduate student government organizations, our own personal reflections, and the reflections of three international students who served in graduate student government organizations at their own institutions, the article examines the unique experiences of graduate students in these roles. Additionally, it offers practical applications for institutions to foster leadership development through graduate student government initiatives.

Literature Review

Graduate school in general can be isolating with more emphasis on individual research and fewer social gathering opportunities, which can lead to depression and anxiety (Lee, 2023). Graduate students can often feel isolated through factors such as the siloing within their departments and a lack of awareness of student resources around campus (Pontius & Harper, 2006). Graduate students are often located within the buildings hosting their departments and may rarely go anywhere else on campus which can contribute to this siloing. Looking at the international graduate student experience, without peer community networks, international graduate students can feel lonely, especially if they come from cultures with close knit communities (Koo et al., 2023; Lee, 2023). Campus engagement and making connections to peers has been shown to influence student sense of belonging and helps international students better connect to the campus community (Slaten et al., 2016).

Graduate Student Connections

Graduate student socialization through activities such as social gatherings with peers and professional associations has been connected to a sense of belonging that helped increase student persistence in their academic programs (Strayhorn, 2019). Pontius and Harper (2006) created several principles for good practice when it comes to graduate student engagement, which included better communication with graduate students, opportunities for community building across departments, and working with departments to create engagement plans. Graduate student government can serve as a way to act upon these principles to encourage graduate student engagement and leadership building, especially since students involved in student organizations are more likely to have opportunities to develop and practice leadership skills (Komives et al., 2011).

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Graduate student leadership development has been an aim and focus of faculty, especially in preparing for workplace leadership, due to calls of academic units, such as business schools (Bennis & O'Toole, 2008), failing to prepare graduate students for leader roles and addressing the challenges in today's workplace. For some, graduate student leadership development needs to be anticipatory leadership development, especially in the medical field (Doublestein et al., 2015), as the future of the field must be prepared for now. In response, academic affairs has presented research-based approaches to enhance self-awareness, reflection, and intentional leadership development (Lawrence & Dunn, 2018). Whitehall et al. (2021) found that an interdisciplinary, online leadership course for graduate students improved students' understanding of themselves, the world around them, and their authentic leadership skills. The connections between the leadership development needed for field-specific performance and how graduate students get those skills through student activities and campus engagement has space for further research.

Transformational leadership theory supports a mutual experience where both leaders and followers feel motivated to engage in organizational processes and to be agents of change (Burns 1978; Bass, 1985). Leadership development programs often use transformational leadership as a theoretical foundation, so that competencies and outcomes prepare students to drive positive change (Ingleton, 2013). Howell et al. (2022) found that transformational leadership development incorporated into doctoral higher education programs improved student outcomes related to career readiness, especially for college and university leadership roles. These findings underscore the relevance of transformational leadership theory not only as a conceptual framework but also as a practical tool for shaping student leaders who are prepared to navigate and influence complex organizational environments in higher education.

Importance of Student Government

Student government organizations have been around since the 1700s within U.S. higher education as a way for primarily undergraduate students to be empowered to call for changes to their higher education institutions (May, 2010). During the Colonial period, U.S. higher education institutions had small populations of White, male students from primarily upper-class families (May, 2010). Institutions during the early days of U.S. higher education treated students as subservient and students used literary societies, which later evolved into the student government organizations we know today, as a way to feel empowered to push back against these views. Literary societies were a way for students in early U.S. higher education to explore their own self-governance when the systems around them did not offer that opportunity (May, 2010). Today, student government associations serve as representatives of the student body, advocates of student voices, and allow for students to take part in shared governance of their institutions (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006; Miles et al., 2008). Other studies have focused on student government as a way for communicating with diverse populations of students as well as advocating for the needs of minoritized students with administrators (Miles et al., 2012). This focus on both communicating and advocating for the needs of diverse populations gives participants in student government space to develop their own identities, capacities, and efficacies as student leaders. Through advocacy, students are able to interrogate their own identities and how those impact their leadership. Through practical application of leadership, students are able to build both their

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skills as leaders as well as their beliefs in their own abilities to use those skills (Guthrie et al., 2021).

While there has been research looking at leadership development through student government (Kuh & Lund, 1994; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Miles, 2011), this research has not examined leadership development or experiences for graduate students who participate in student government associations. Instead, research looking at student government leadership has generally had a positional lens, focused on student government presidents and top leaders, primarily undergraduate students, instead of expanding this research to student government representatives who might not hold the top position (Kuh & Lund, 1994; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Miles, 2011). This has provided an opportunity for us to work to fill that gap through our own reflections and the reflections of other graduate students concerning the varied experiences within graduate student government associations.

Graduate Student Government: Identity, Capacity, and Efficacy

The Congress of Graduate Students (COGS) at Florida State University (FSU) serves as the setting for how our own graduate student leadership development occurred through graduate student government. This is the organization that we (Josh and Laura) were involved in and had experiences concerning our own leadership learning and development. Florida State University is a predominately White institution in the Southeast United States. In the Fall 2024 semester, there were 9,421 graduate students enrolled at FSU (Florida State University Institutional Research, 2024a), with 1,599 of those students being classified as 'Nonresident Alien,' which is a title for FSU to refer to international students within their classification system (Florida State University Institutional Research, 2024b). However, we would like to note that this is not inclusive of all international students and only looks at those who hold specific visa statuses. As of 2025, COGS is a part of the Office of Student Governance & Advocacy under the Division of Student Affairs. COGS consists of graduate students in various programs, such as master's, doctoral, etc., from 15 colleges across the university.

COGS provides graduate students with the opportunity to advocate for those within their colleges, engage with other graduate students outside of their departments, and become more involved with the campus community as a whole. These opportunities allow for leader identity, capacity, and efficacy development which are essential to leadership learning experiences (Guthrie et al., 2021). The leadership learning framework (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018) allows leadership educators to provide opportunities for leadership learning and skill development intentionally. With COGS, this development and learning is connected to the organizational structure, student engagement, and campus environment.

Identity

First, graduate students who are involved with student government have an opportunity to expand their leadership identity through individual and shared experiences (Guthrie et al., 2021). The graduate students in COGS come from a broad spectrum of social identity groups, including minoritized identities such as being international students of color. These social identities have the potential to contribute to forming a more significant leadership identity for individuals in COGS. Representatives are elected by members of their college or the

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graduate student body in order to fill seats within the congress. While many of the seats are based on academic colleges, several seats are associated with social identity groups, such as the international student advocate, LGBTQ+ student advocate, or veterans advocate seats. Representatives who hold these seats may identify as members of these groups or have personal motivations to represent the students who are part of them. Most representatives are nominated and elected for seats associated with the academic college in which they are graduate students. Many graduate students join to represent and advocate for their academic college and other students who are in their graduate programs.

Capacity

Leadership capacity can be expanded through several forms in COGS. From intentional training opportunities to simple observation of COGS meetings and processes, there is a throughline purpose of building a knowledge base of student government so that all representatives can engage as deeply or as little as they desire in all that occurs in the student government body. For example, semesterly retreats take place, either at an off-or-on-campus location, where new representatives can connect with executive board leadership to learn about the processes and gain knowledge on engaging in COGS. From there, representatives attend and engage in assembly meetings to propose and vote on bills and bring attention to issues related to graduate student life. Outside of these, there are several committees representatives can be leaders and members of, including student affairs, internal affairs, student advocacy, and a budget committee for the annual budget process. Regardless of whether they hold an executive leadership position, all representatives gain leadership capacities through the representation of their individual colleges or identity group. It is vital to note that any representative can meet and gain capacity-building support from a COGS advisor and other SGA full-time administrative staff.

Efficacy

Lastly, representatives demonstrate efficacy in various ways throughout an academic year. One salient connection is targeting international graduate students to be more involved in graduate student government. Through attending events like the International Student Orientation and International Coffee Hour, COGS outreach to international students is meant to empower and connect them with the ways their leadership is needed and can affect the larger FSU community. Even after students become representatives, and demonstrate capacity to lead in COGS, settings like the assembly meetings or committee meetings can reinforce their efficacy through positive comments given to them during the "roundtable" portion of the schedule, support of shared opinions during legislative debates, and opportunities to turn their visions into reality through the legislation processes.

Positionality and Reflections on the Graduate Student Government Journey

Not all graduate students have the same pathway that leads them to involvement in graduate student government associations and we would like to share our own experiences on this journey that allowed us to help develop our own identities, capacities, and efficacies as student government members and leaders. We also want to raise up the voices of international graduate student representatives who have pathways to graduate student government involvement that differ from our own (White, domestic) experiences. This

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highlights the diversity of participants in graduate student government and showcases how this diversity of experiences brings a depth of understanding concerning why students may become involved in graduate student government.

Josh's Pathway to Graduate Student Government

I (Josh) am a White, cis-gendered man with a first-generation college student identity. My graduate student experience occurred as I completed a Masters in Higher Education program. Before this program, I had just completed my Bachelor in History and Secondary Education. Since I had this straight transition from undergraduate to graduate programs, I have not yet had any full-time work experience. While gaining professional experience in my graduate assistantship, I wanted to expand my leadership growth through on-campus involvement. Compared to undergraduate student involvement, there are fewer organizations specifically aligned with graduate students, which made the initial search more straightforward. However, as I explored these organizations further, I found that most were discipline-specific and didn't align with my academic or personal interests.

The dual identity of being a part-time professional and a graduate student made for a different pathway to campus engagement. I wanted to continue my leadership development, which I intentionally focused on during my undergraduate experience, and find a community of other graduate students with whom I could work and grow. While several graduate student organizations were on campus, I connected with the Congress of Graduate Students during my first Fall semester. Announcements for the SGA elections were posted, and I looked into them more out of pure curiosity. I discovered that the Congress of Graduate Students was part of these elections, and a College of Education seat was open. I hesitated to submit my name for consideration because I had a short experience with undergraduate student government and did not have an overall positive experience. Yet, I knew that this would be a path to meet other graduate students and an opportunity to engage in leadership.

My COGS leadership identity was formed initially from my academic background. I saw myself as more of a representative of the College of Education, someone who was there to listen but not influence. It wasn't until I started to tap into my graduate student identity that I saw myself as a leader. I learned more about what it meant to be a graduate student leader by getting to know the other graduate student representatives and listening to them about their experiences, areas of passion, and visions of an institution that supported their graduate students. Embracing this broader sense of leadership transformed how I showed up in COGS—I no longer viewed myself as a passive representative, but as someone with the responsibility and ability to shape outcomes alongside others. This shift marked a turning point in my leadership identity, grounding it in advocacy, collaboration, and a commitment to serving the collective needs of graduate students.

As I became more deeply involved in COGS, my capacity expanded through committee involvement, executive board experience, and budget management. After my first semester in COGS, I was approached about an opportunity to run for an executive board position as the Deputy Speaker for Finance. At first, I was hesitant because I knew that these positions required a greater time commitment and elevated visibility, and this position, in particular, flexed skills and knowledge I wasn't sure I possessed yet. Despite my hesitancy, I ran and was elected as the Deputy Speaker for an entire academic year. Through managing the

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annual budget, I honed skills in strategic planning, data-informed decision-making, and cross-functional communication. The most important lesson from this was that capacity growth is not meant to be an individual journey. The person who was in the position before me was willing to meet, go over the processes she developed, and answer any questions that I had. This experience taught me that leadership capacity is not simply built through formal roles or technical skills but through relationships, mentorship, and a willingness to learn alongside others.

This does not mean that my confidence in my ability to perform and lead was always upheld, and I was often emotionally and mentally pulled by other responsibilities in graduate school. Yet, I found the environment of COGS to be overwhelmingly motivating and inspiring, so I felt driven to be involved and engaged. Especially as I started to receive feedback from my peers, saw the tangible outcomes of budget approvals, and increased participation in financial decision-making, I internalized a sense of leadership efficacy. By the time I graduated, I had been involved with COGS for four semesters and felt confident that I had grown significantly as a leader. It became clear that leadership wasn't about certainty but about consistency and responsiveness.

Laura's Pathway to Graduate Student Government

I (Laura) am a White, cis-gender woman and my pathway to leadership within my graduate student experience started off a little less traditional than some graduate students, which mirrors how many graduate students can fall under non-traditional categories. I worked as a full time staff member while also pursuing an in-person Masters in Higher Education degree and then a Masters of Business Administration through an online program. I was not very involved outside of work and taking classes during this time, but near the end of my first Masters degree, I learned about Staff Council which allowed for me to connect more with the general campus community and provided me with the chance to help support other staff members around campus. After finishing my MBA, I realized that I still had the desire to do more with my career and that led me to quitting my full time job in order to pursue a Ph.D. in Higher Education as a full time student. While I had been a part time student for the previous five years, going to a new institution as a full time student was an experience that challenged me in many ways. By going into a new program at a different institution, I lost some of the leader identity, capacity, and efficacy I held previously concerning the campus environment.

I might have been a little off footed when it came to my new identity as a full time graduate student, but that did not mean I was not determined to work to develop it. During one of my intro classes during my first fall semester, we had a guest speaker who shared that the Congress of Graduate Students had open College of Education seats and wanted to encourage people to get involved. I thought that by joining COGS, it would give me a broader perspective of my new institution and would allow me to build my own capacity for leadership within a new environment. I decided to petition for the position, and it changed my trajectory within my Ph.D. journey. I was able to meet other students across campus departments and build a sense of my own self-efficacy as a leader as I started to gain more confidence in my place on campus. COGS allowed me to better understand the more intricate aspects of Florida State University and how those aspects differed when it came to

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student involvement, shared governance, and several other aspects compared to the previous institutions I had attended.

When the Deputy Speaker of Communications stepped down in my 2nd year, I was encouraged by others to run for the position. Through my experience in this role, I was able to build capacities related to the job, but also within my own leadership as I helped to coordinate various campus events and build relationships among different departments and graduate student organizations across campus. I also served on the student advocacy, student affairs, and budget committees during my time in COGS which showed me that there were many graduate student needs across campus that needed support from members of COGS and that our voice had the power to reach decision makers in a way that graduate students were not able to do so on their own. Through COGS I was able to develop a part of my identity as a graduate student advocate that I might not have been able to develop if I had only stayed inside my department or only joined professional organizations. This growth in my identity as an advocate allowed me to have the efficacy to actually accept that I am a leader and that my work can make real change within a space. I might have held leadership positions in the past, but I never really associated my identity as one that was a leader. COGS along with other experiences within my Ph.D. program helped me to accept that part of my own identity and gave me greater efficacy to work to improve the leadership capacities and efficacies within my peers.

International Student Reflections on Graduate Student Government

Our experiences as graduate students within graduate student government associations are only two of many experiences, and we want to highlight the different experiences that graduate students have, including international graduate students. The number of international graduate students within U.S. higher education grew significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2024), and the increase of international graduate students within U.S. higher education should be included when thinking on how to build leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy for graduate students within student government. Laura's dissertation work focuses on how international graduate students holding leadership positions within U.S. higher education student organizations and graduate student government understood concepts of leadership through a qualitative, narrative inquiry study investigating their past and current experiences concerning leadership (Vaughn, 2025). Three of her participants had direct experience with graduate student government associations at their graduate institutions in the United States. Her study shares how those experiences allowed them to build on their own leader identity, capacity, and efficacy as student leaders (Vaughn, 2025). Each of their experiences differed when it came to getting involved in graduate student government, but all of them were motivated by helping to support other graduate students within their departments.

Jamie

Jamie is from Canada and had been involved in student government during her undergraduate studies. While she had experience with student government in Canada, student government in the United States was a different experience. She shared that her initial motivation to join the graduate student government on her campus was because she wanted to meet other graduate students outside of her department. Similar to past research

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on the matter, Jamie felt isolated and siloed from the wider campus community and wanted to learn more about what was happening on campus. She also was motivated to join her graduate student government because the seat for her department was empty and she wanted to make sure that student voices were being heard by the greater campus community. Through involvement in graduate student government, Jamie found more leadership efficacy within herself to empower and advocate for student organizations on campus that needed support. It has also helped her to view herself and her actions as part of leadership even though she still feels like a leader in progress. Jamie also gained a better understanding of how student government was run in the United States which helped to build her leadership capacity for understanding political aspects outside of Canada.

Ven

Ven is from Nigeria and his motivation to join a graduate student government association was to meet other students across campus who were similarly motivated. He wanted to have more connection to the campus environment and was very curious to learn more about how student government was run in the United States. Similar to Jamie, he also wanted to serve his department as a representative so that he could learn about campus events that he could then share with those in his department so that they could expand their own engagement outside of their department and hopefully feel a little less siloed. Through a better understanding of U.S. higher education systems and events, Ven was able to increase his capacity to advocate for his department. While Ven shared that he has had a great experience with his graduate student government association, he was nervous when he decided to run for a seat since he was not sure how many international students were already representatives and was not sure if his culture, language, and accent would be too different to be accepted. His desire to get involved was enough to push him past these concerns and become involved in graduate student government. Serving within student government allowed Ven to improve his leadership self-efficacy, better understand leadership in the United States, and influenced his views that it is important to be a more selfless leader who works to help others without getting distracted by needing to find individual profit or benefit.

Atusa

Atusa is from Iran and had already stepped forward as a leader within a student organization on her institution's campus, but found that she did not fully understand the processes related to funding and the overall running of student government. She decided to join her institution's graduate student government organization in order to build her capacities as the leader of a student organization and to advocate for international students in her department. Through her experiences within graduate student government, she was able to build connections across campus that allowed her to better put together fully funded student events for both international students as well as other graduate students within her department. This increase in her capacity and efficacy as a leader through campus involvement even led to her organizing a new weekly departmental event that allowed graduate students to meet each other and socialize outside of their classes. She likely would not have started this new event within her program if she did not have the knowledge of

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navigating higher education systems due to her experiences within graduate student government.

Overall Reflections

Through analysis of the findings concerning graduate student involvement, without opportunities to join graduate student government associations, the authors, Jamie, Ven, and Atusa would likely have stayed siloed within their individual departments and/or cultural groups. Graduate student government involvement allowed us all to connect with other graduate students across campus, build interdepartmental bridges, and build the skills necessary to navigate a college campus in the United States. Graduate student government provided opportunities for greater involvement in the wider campus since those who took part in graduate student government became more aware of different events occurring on campus that they might not have otherwise due to the siloed nature of graduate programs (Vaughn, 2025). The siloing of graduate students in their programs can limit how students can become connected with the larger institution, and graduate student government helps to break down those boundaries and allows for greater connections among graduate students to build relationships and overall bonds with their institution. Graduate student government also gave Jamie, Ven, and Atusa the opportunities to reflect on their own identities as international graduate students, capacities as student representatives and leaders, and efficacy that they would be able to be student leaders on their respective campuses even though they do not fit more traditional views of student government members being undergraduate, domestic students.

Applications to Practice

From the findings of our study, we have put together several suggestions that you, your offices, and your institutions can enact in order to build up the leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy of graduate students within your institution through student government and leadership building opportunities. Modern leadership education focuses on the idea that anyone can be a leader and take part in the leadership process, and we feel that more institutions within the United States should remember that when building leadership programs so that no student group is excluded from leadership building opportunities.

Build Up Graduate Student Government Associations

Through our experiences within graduate student government, we want to encourage other higher education institutions to consider building a graduate student government experience if there is not already one at your institution. If there is one, we want to encourage you to see how it is being supported by students and administrators. Is it included within major campus decisions or is it pushed aside with only the Speaker/President brought in for publicity shots? Graduate students are an important part of higher education institutions and their potential to improve higher education should not be limited to research and classroom experiences. The policies being passed on higher education campuses often impact graduate students, but without proper communication and shared governance, graduate students do not get to voice their thoughts on potential policies until it is often too late to take any action. Creating a graduate student government can work to

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increase advocacy efforts for graduate students, but this also requires buy-in from existing student government and administrators. If administration at your institution does not see the importance or need for graduate student voices to be included, then creating a graduate student government association will only lead to that association to be pushed to the side and minimized in their actions on campus. It is critical to work with both administrators and the current student government association to show how uplifting the voices of graduate students through a graduate student government can benefit the institution and campus environment.

Incorporating Leadership Development in Graduate Student Organizations

For institutions with already existing graduate student government organizations, we want to encourage supporting administrators and staff to incorporate more intentional leadership development within your graduate student organizations. Many institutions build leadership training opportunities centered on undergraduate student government members. These leadership opportunities focus on activities and curriculum to support the growth of student government members who are within the traditional undergraduate stage of life. Institutions might then extend the invitation to graduate student leaders to join these already built programs if there is additional space. This fails to address how graduate students are on different developmental levels and need leadership training focused on their specific needs as graduate student leaders. Graduate students are often older than traditionally aged undergraduate students and have had additional life experiences that undergraduate students might not have experienced. Leadership training sessions need to incorporate the variations of ages and life experiences when it comes to the needs of graduate student government members.

Utilizing the Leadership Learning Framework

This difference in leadership learning that is needed for graduate students can be achieved by utilizing the Leadership Learning Framework to assess how each of the six aspects of learning contribute holistically to knowledge development (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). These six aspects include leadership development, leadership engagement, leadership observation, leadership training, and metacognition. Leadership development is inclusive of building leadership capacities as well as social capital (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Some options for engaging students in leadership development include storytelling, vision boards, and participating in service learning. Leadership engagement relates to more interpersonal parts of leadership learning such as direct interactions with others. This learning can be enhanced through team-building activities, internships, and reflective practices (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Leadership observation helps participants use their observation skills to see how leadership is practiced socially and culturally through activities such as shadowning, field assignments, and witnessing group dynamics. Leadership training focuses on building skill-based and competency-based learning and can be developed through activities such as role-play, debate, and simulations (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Metacognition relates to how much someone is aware of their own leadership learning and their progress within the leadership process. Metacognition can be developed through field-work, group discussion, feedback (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). When it comes to graduate students, an example of how this can be put in practice is by checking if all members in the graduate student

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organization are actively involved with leadership metacognition by going beyond just immediate reflection. We also encourage leadership training programming to be extended over a longer period of time rather than just occurring during one weekend or day. Leadership principles and training takes time and one day of team building exercises is not enough to set up graduate student leaders for success.

Focusing on Leader Identity, Capacity, and Efficacy

Within your graduate student leadership training, we also want to encourage you to work on activities and practices that focus on leader identity, capacity, and efficacy building. Graduate students are usually older than traditional undergraduate students, so they may be a little more advanced when it comes to building identity, capacities, or self-efficacy, and that is an opportunity to dive deeper into the concepts rather than just covering the basics. This opens up the possibility for more complex discussions on identity terms such as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) or the multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & Abes, 2013). It is common within leadership education for students to mix up the term capacity with efficacy, but by explaining these terms with more nuance that can be matched with the experiences of graduate students, they might be better equipped to understand these terms more easily than some undergraduate students with fewer life experiences. It is key that leadership educators work to incorporate student experiences with their own leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy so that graduate students are able to better relate to the terms and apply them to their own leadership practices.

Expanding Leadership Perspectives

Expanding on and applying personal leadership perspectives also allows for space to examine leadership outside of the United States by sharing examples of how different cultures practice or view leadership. This can provide opportunities for discussions comparing and contrasting how people understand who is a leader and how leadership is practiced. Leadership is taught and based on primarily westernized views of what leadership can be and who is viewed as a leader, and this does not always apply to countries outside of the United States who might view leadership as a negative term or a term that does not apply within their culture. Leadership might also be viewed primarily as something that is viewed through a specific position within countries and is not always inclusive of the leadership process which calls for collaboration and the view that anyone can practice leadership. Ultimately, engaging with global leadership perspectives strengthens students' cultural humility, adaptability, and capacity for inclusive leadership—skills that are increasingly critical in all leadership roles.

Expanding Leadership Efficacy

Through a deeper dive on efficacy, students can better understand what internal and external factors are impacting their own beliefs in their abilities to practice leadership. Breaking down these factors can often give students the opportunity to reflect and deconstruct their own personal experiences that have played a part in how they view their own abilities as well as the abilities of others to practice leadership. Pairing these experiences with reflective exercises can help students identify turning points in their efficacy development (Söderhjelm et al., 2018). Graduate students may not feel as included

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within leadership opportunities on campus due to many campuses putting greater focus on undergraduate leadership training and experiences. Institutions have the chance to expand their leadership offerings to be more inclusive of graduate students so that graduate students can build up their efficacy for campus leadership and have a greater sense of belonging within the institution. Expanded leadership efficacy not only enhances personal confidence but also contributes to more confident and empowered leadership communities.

Conclusion

In closing, we hope that the reflections we have shared concerning our experiences within graduate student government organizations and how they have helped us build our own identities, capacities, and efficacies can provide you with insight and inspiration to develop graduate student government programming within your own institutions. Student government provides great opportunities for developing leadership, and these opportunities should not only be given to undergraduate students. Building leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy through practical experience within graduate student government shows graduate students that they can be a part of shared governance within higher education and that their voice does matter. While graduate student government may not be offered at all institutions or may be pushed to the side at other institutions, it is a powerful tool to empower both domestic and international graduate students to become involved on campus. We encourage you to take a look at your own institutions, see how graduate students are or are not being included within student government and overall student involvement activities, and examine what you can do to bridge potential gaps within your own department concerning graduate student engagement.

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Human Participants

IRB was approved through Florida State University for the participants discussed in this article.

Originality Note

We confirm that the manuscript is our original works, and if others' works are used, they are properly cited/ quoted.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The authors claimed that there is "No Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies" in preparing this research.

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