

Running Head: CULTURE OF COMMITMENT

Cultivating a Culture of Commitment within Student Leadership Organizations

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Abstract

This capstone project provides insight into the motivations behind why students stay committed within their leadership organizations at their universities. A Grounded Theory of current student-leader feedback produced five themes that can assist supervisors in creating an organizational culture that cultivates commitment within its students. Additional resources were created to implement these themes into the structure and daily expectations of a current student leadership organization. The results show the benefits of establishing an intentional and deliberate culture that allows students to learn, serve and grow into the committed leaders of our future.

Keywords: student leadership, commitment, organizational culture

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Signature Page

I certify that I have read this thesis and that, in my opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a project for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication.

Project Chair

Arthur Challis, Ed.D

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Introduction

Students who are actively engaged in leadership roles during their college years are positioned to be more successful in their careers once they graduate (Parker, 2017). These involvement opportunities teach and foster valuable skills such as communication, motivation, delegation and commitment, which employers are seeking in their employees (Doyle, 2017). Establishing the benefits of student leadership is not a difficult task; the difficult part is asking advisors of these organizations to establishing an environment that cultivates these committed student leaders. Student leadership advisors are tasked with assisting these students in their developmental journey, while simultaneously protecting the best interests of their organization. Understanding and fostering commitment within student leaders can achieve this delicate balance, which proves essential to both the organizational culture and the positive outcomes on the student's future. Research shows that people who are committed to an organization “generate positive contributions to the organization, manifest lower desires to be absent from the work, and have a more pronounced working performance than the people who are not committed” (Todorovic, Cabarkapa, Tosic-Radev, & Miladinovic, 2017, p. 873). Commitment also fosters feelings of loyalty among team members and creates a culture of hard work producing high productivity levels (Eaton, 2014), which is highly desirable in any work environment.

Over the course of the last four years, I have identified five major themes in the motivations for college students' organizational commitment and implemented them into a current student leadership organization, the Presidential Ambassadors at Southern Utah University, to establish and cultivate a committed student leadership environment. With

this knowledge in mind, several other resources were also created to help other advisors establish a committed organizational culture within their student leadership groups. These resources include; a culture dashboard (Appendix 1.1), student self-evaluation (Appendix 1.2) and organization handbook (Appendix 1.3). Understanding why a student feels commitment to an organization is the first step towards creating an overall organizational culture that cultivates commitment within its students.

Literature Review

The literature examined reviews the main topics associated with promoting a culture of commitment within the student leadership role. Although there is much research regarding achieving commitment within an organization, the current body of literature did not produce any specific research regarding how or why students choose to stay committed to their leadership roles at a university or how advisors can effectively establish a committed student environment. In order to give a broader understanding of the information found within the current literature, related subjects are highlighted such as: student leadership engagement and development, the need for better assessment of student leadership, organizational commitment and culture, and the relationships of students to their universities are reviewed. This section will also further include limitations of the current body of research available, which will establish the demand for this specific examination.

Student Leadership Engagement and Development

It is important to establish a baseline of what leadership is and how it is defined and measured. Current research illustrates a particular focus on a leadership style titled,

transformational leadership. Researchers indicate that it is the most popular leadership paradigm of the past twenty years. “Transformational leaders strive to change, elevate, and unify the goals of followers as well as inspire them to pursue challenging and shared objectives” (Whitford & Moss, 2009). Five clusters of behavior are associated with this leadership style. First is the promotion of intellectual stimulations where followers are encouraged to challenge the conventional assumptions of the organization. Second, transformational leaders, provide a more unified vision of the future that is inspiring and unifying. Third, leaders always provide the necessary support, encouragement, coaching and advise to each individual and their specific needs. This support boosts self-esteem and allows individuals to open up about their wants and vision. Fourth, transformational leaders focus on the qualities, attributes and strengths of each employee, by using inspirational communication. Lastly, such leaders give recognition and praise to the contributions of each employee. This differs from the transactional style of leadership that offers incentives and feedback to persuade employees. Transformational leadership is said to be increasing work attitudes, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and creativity within their employees (Whitford & Moss, 2009).

The environment where leaders are placed also plays a large role in whether their leadership is highlighted and encouraged or hidden and deteriorates. Behavior is a function of the person’s environment or situation, in that the person and the environment interact to produce behavior; individuals select environments where their characteristics can thrive (Shannahan, Bush & Shannahan, 2013). Studies have also been conducted to investigate whether the traditional styles of leadership are adaptable to the ever-changing

work environments we see in our present day. This includes when employees and supervisors are communicating from a distance.

Another analysis conducted focuses on student leadership and training, expressing the opinion that the higher education sphere continuously expresses commitment to the development of student leaders yet ranks among the worst at providing adequate training (Ostrom-Blonigen, Bornsen, Larson-Casselton & Erickson, 2010). Successful student leadership training programs can help bridge the gap between and the students and their community and students to employees. Ostrom-Blonigen, et. al. states:

In 1996, Fiedler wrote that the “scarcity of sound research on training has been among the most glaring shortcomings in the leadership area. Most of the training programs are untested and, at best, of uncertain value. Yet, 14 years later, “very limited research has been conducted in the area of assessment within student affairs” (Green et al., 2008, p. 135). Most leadership training programs were qualitatively assessed or simply not assessed. However, it is through the examination of leadership training assessments (that) . . . an important understanding of the ability of current efforts to achieve improvements in leadership will occur.

The training and education of these students proves very critical for them as they start to graduate and move into the workforce.

Need for Assessment in Student Leadership

Now that we have established the literature regarding the development and definition of leadership, we now examine how administrators can properly assess student leadership within their own organizations. In one analysis conducted, researchers

examined how assessment efforts can improve student learning and outcomes. “External pressures calling for institutional accountability and internal demands to improve student learning make involvement in assessment a fundamental role of higher education faculty members in the 21st century” (Guetterman & Mitchell, 2015, p. 43). The research examines the roadblocks that faculty can face when trying to establish a culture that values consistent and valuable assessment practices. A lack of faculty buy-in could be a significant barrier in the implementation of assessment of student leaders, along with the absence of a defined culture, hindering organizational policies and overloaded schedules of the faculty members. In the conclusion, researchers found that by establishing a proper process of assessment, adopting a broader conceptualization of use for the findings, expanding the notion of leadership to include administrators, and by developing communities of practices among faculty to exchange ideas (Guetterman & Mitchell, 2015, p. 55), can assist in creating a proper culture of assessment within any institution.

One study found relates heavily to the importance of assessment of specific student leadership competencies and gives great evidence to the nature of assessment being examined within this analysis. Establishing clear competencies can provide a “common language within which to train and evaluate individuals on leadership and can be used to design curriculum, market experiences, and assess or evaluate learning” (Seemiller, 2016, p. 52). To assist in this assessment, organization can create their own competency list, execute a competency map to pair outcomes and objectives and lastly measure competency development and proficiency. One of the methods discussed in length is that of a self-evaluation, where students report their learning in specific dimensions based on their participation and experience. Although there are some

drawbacks, Seemiller lists that the benefits can include reliable and authentic feedback and it serves as a self-reflection opportunity that can assist in lifelong learning (Seemiller, 2016, p. 55). He also lists several benefits to leadership and competency assessment, first being individual competency development where it can allow students to better understand themselves as they reflect on their proficiencies. Second, program evaluation, which allows the organization to internally assess program content, curriculum and delivery. Third, program design, which can be useful for benchmarking program decisions and if they are serving the desired outcomes. Forth, data reporting, this is useful in describing the overall impact of a particular program and experiences. This research demonstrates the need an importance for the assessment of student leaders within any leadership organization.

Organizational Commitment and Culture

Since this analysis does focus on student commitment to a leadership organization, it is importance to acknowledge the literature that is present regarding organizational commitment. In one study, the researchers distinguishes three components of organizational commitment: affective commitment exists when an employee wants to remain in the organization because of an emotional attachment; normative commitment stems from feelings of obligation of the employee to remain in the organization because of incentives given or favors done (salaries or trainings); commitment through staying within the organization refers to the notion of accumulated benefits that could be lost if one leaves (friends in the workplace, benefits, etc.) (Todorovic, Cabarkapa, Tomic-Radev, & Miladinovic, 2017, p. 871). The study concludes by determining that military

personnel are characterized by a high degree of both organizational commitment and organizational identification in comparison with employees in the civil sector.

Another article examines the link between organizational commitment and turnover rates, along with work engagement and the person-supervisor fit. Organizational commitment is understood here as a bond or linkage of individuals to their organization (Jun-Cheng, Wen-Quan, Zhao & Jun, 2015, p. 1659). The motivations of whether or not to maintain their organizational membership could be because of willingness, normative obligation, high costs associated with leaving, lacking occupational alternatives or the chance of realizing their ideals (Jun-Cheng, Wen-Quan, Zhao & Jun, 2015, p. 1661). Regardless, any individual who choose to commit to an organization will manifest greater work engagement, defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Jun-Cheng, Wen-Quan, Zhao & Jun, 2015, pg. 1659). The results concluded that work engagement caused by organizational commitment partially resolved the negative relation to turnover intention.

Commitment to an organization can also be a result of the organizational culture found within the group. The basic idea is that organizations can be studied with the same concepts and methods that we use to study cultures (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997, p. 202). “In a fundamental sense, a culture exists when people come to share a common frame of reference for interpreting and acting toward one another and the world in which they live. It is reflected in customs, folkways, communication and other features of the community” (Bormann, Howell, Nichols, & Shapiro, 1982). The communication found within these organizations is a result of the organizations culture that is come with that common reference frame, which is established by the language, values, beliefs and

interpretations of experience from the members within them. (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997, p. 203). There are several perspectives in regards to how we can view organizational culture, such as; traditionalist, interpretivist and critical-interpretivist. Traditionalists are usually concerned with how to develop and change an organization's culture in order to make it more effective, which fits in well with any managerial role inside an organization. Through this perspective, managers or advisors, are able to create a set of personal values, establish rules (or the way things should or should not be), and figure out how to create a productive work environment (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997, p. 209). This research demonstrates how advisors of an organization can create a culture that is focused on the values established.

Relationship of Students to their Universities

Since the specific organization we are focusing on within this research is within college or university setting, investigating research regarding students' development and commitment levels to this type of organization plays a large part. One research study explored the organizational identification that students' form with their university. Organizational identification (OID) is a form of social identification where "individuals define themselves in terms of their organizational membership" (Myers, Davis, Schreuder & Seibold, 2016, p. 211). This research targeted over 600 current students of a public institution and asked them to identify occasions or experiences that made them feel more or less attached to the university. The results reported responses for helping students be more attached that included; campus sporting events, university sponsored social events, university sponsored organizations, the surrounding student-inhabited community, academic, student activism on campus, etc. (Myers, Davis, Schreuder & Seibold, 2016, p.

221). Responses for reasons they felt less attached included; effects/repercussions of the recent budget crisis, academics or university services, university life in general, fellow students, etc. (Myers, Davis, Schreuder & Seibold, 2016, p. 222). Participation in a university-sponsored organization had one of the most positive effects on students becoming more attached to their institution. Myers states, “The events and experiences that most students believe affect their attachment are sponsored and organized by the university and are important for strengthening students’ relationship with their school” (Myers, Davis, Schreuder & Seibold, 2016, p. 224). The more OID and attachment that universities can produce in students, the more likely they are to be dedicated students that demonstrate school pride (Myers, Davis, Schreuder & Seibold, 2016, p. 225). The organization within this capstone project is university sponsored and I believe does produce some of our most dedicated students and eventually alumni for our institution.

Another research study specifically examined the influence of the religious and communication variables on student commitment at a church-related university (Forward, Daugherty, Michel & Sandberg, 2009, p. 34). The results showed that students who feel that the “university genuinely cares about their well-being, both academically and personally, will have higher levels of perceived organizational support” and therefore reciprocate that support by being more committed to the institution (Forward, Daugherty, Michel & Sandberg, 2009, p. 45). Another main factor of organizational commitment for students is whether or not they feel satisfied with their communication experiences at the school, including the level of education. Forward states, “The more students engage with their classmates and professors, the greater their overall commitment to the university” (Forward, Daugherty, Michel & Sandberg, 2009, p. 45). The overarching factor present in

this research was the religious factor of the institution, which was also found to have a significant impact on the commitment levels in students since they are able to connect their academic and spiritual lives in one environment. Interestingly, in the conclusion of the research, the author indicates the importance of student development and programming. Forward states, “Further study should examine what variables affect students’ perceived organizational support, so they may focus programming on those specific areas” (Forward, Daugherty, Michel & Sandberg, 2009, p. 48). The purpose of this capstone project is to address some of those motivators for advisors to implement into their organizational programming.

Justification for project:

The current body of research is vast in the relating areas of student leadership, assessment of that leadership, organizational commitment and organizational culture, as well as how students stay attached and committed to their specific institutions. However, there is a lack of research focused on the commitment and motivations of student leaders to their leadership organizations, which is very relevant to the populations involved with working in the higher education atmospheres. As the research illustrated, there is a need to establish proper training and assessment practices when assisting in student leadership organizations. Unlike the professional world, students possess different motivations for why they are seeking leadership experiences, which should be addressed independently. The research is also lacking in providing a proper and relevant student perspective regarding commitment levels, motivations, and reasons for membership that could provide organizations with knowledge in establishing organizational cultures that cultivate and sustain productive student leadership. This grounded theory analysis and

various resources established through this research will be able to fill some of the holes that are present within the current body of literature.

Method

The methods selected for this capstone project include two parts; first a Grounded Theory Analysis was completed to produce the five major themes in the Theory of Communicated Commitment based upon current student leader feedback. Second, using the knowledge of the established themes, supplemental resources were created that would assist in implementing these motivators into a current leadership organization to increase the organizations culture of commitment. These resources will be presented in the results section and hard copies displayed in the appendices.

The method of Grounded Theory was chosen based upon the uniqueness of the text being examined and the lack of a current theory that could encompass the data collected. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define the Grounded Theory approach as, “a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (p. 12). The correct procedures of establishing a valid grounded theory were followed. After establishing the desired text chosen to complete the analysis, the process began with the open coding of the data. In this initial step, an all-encompassing list of themes found illustrated throughout the text was generated. This process continued on until no new themes manifested and the point of theoretical saturation was reached. The second step was to perform axial coding, where an analysis of the themes was conducted to discover where the themes related to one another, which established some major theme categories and

sub-categories. Once the established theme categories became both mutually exclusive and exhaustive, the final step of selective coding was accomplished. Upon completion of this process, the Theory of Communicated Commitment was established.

The text that was analyzed in this study is a collection of self-evaluations from over 100 college students who were current members of the Presidential Ambassador team at Southern Utah University beginning from the Fall 2015 semester through the Fall 2017 semester. These self-evaluations were completed as a part of the student's final exam and were created to be a reflection of self-performance for the concluding term. The evaluations were either written or typed and submitted to their advisor before an individual interview was conducted. A series of ten questions were presented, with the expectation of honest and open feedback from each student's individual perspective. This text was specifically selected because of the close proximity of the students and the valuable nature of the self-reported student perspective regarding their commitment to the leadership team. The feedback has been used to assist in making positive changes to the Ambassador program and in gaining insights into the thoughts and feelings of each student. Although several questions were asked, for the focus of this study, the theory was concentrated on the answers produced from question number seven; *"Describe your commitment level to the Ambassador program. What are your main motivating factors for being part of the team?"* An example of the full self-evaluation is included in Appendix 1.2.

To provide some additional context regarding the Presidential Ambassador program, the organizations primary focus is on the recruitment of prospective students to Southern Utah University (SUU). The students involved within the program perform

perspective students tours, travel to various location on recruitment visits, host at perspective student events held on campus, and assist in a assortment of campus activities throughout the academic year. The team currently consists of 55 students who are all enrolled full-time at SUU; the various members are affiliated with a variety of declared majors, and come from all over the state of Utah, Nevada and other U.S. territories. Members are selected through a rigorous application process, competing against over 120 other students for a minimal number of open positions. Once a member, students earn a half-tuition scholarship to the university if all expectations and contractual agreements are upheld. Students must remain in good standing in order to be invited back to the team from year to year.

Analysis/Results

The Theory of Communicated Commitment centers on how college student leaders are able to articulate their commitment levels to their leadership organization. The theory produced intriguing insights into what motivates and connects students to continue to be involved within their leadership organization. It is also beneficial for advisors to understand how to structure their organizations in a way that produces and fosters the attribute of commitment within its student leaders. Through the development of the theory, five major themes emerged: *beacon behavior*, *big picture perspective*, *display of positive qualities*, *team connection*, and *personal benefits*.

Beacon Behavior

This first central theme that appeared through the identified text is a genuine desire within the student to display “beacon behavior”. This behavior is defined as the student’s eagerness to share their personal experiences with the hope of being able to help

and guide other students in their journey to find their place after high school. This type of mentality was listed numerous times as a main motivating factor for why students choose to continue to stay committed to the program. This includes opportunities such as answering important questions future students might have, making genuine connections on tours or visits they perform, assisting students through the admission and acceptance processes, and simply being able to share their own positive experiences with the purpose of providing assistance in another student's journey of discovery. An example of this beacon behavior can be found in this student's response:

I am fully committed to this team, I plan on being apart of it for the whole 4 years I am at SUU. My main motivation is to provide guidance and support for those students who don't know what they want to do with their life after high school, whether it's at SUU or not, because that used to be me until I was able to meet former ambassadors." (Kylee M. - Sophomore)

Although these examples are specific to the community of higher education and recruitment since that is the main objective of the ambassador program; beacon behavior can be applied to any group by an individual communicating their desire to help others achieve something or to share their personal experiences. Another example of this motivation for many students was the opportunity this program gives them to share their positive experiences with potential students. This is illustrated by this feedback:

I am here to help people have the experience that I am having here at SUU which has been incredible...so you best believe that I will do what it takes to get the message out of what we have to offer to future students with all programs, professors, etc. (Randon C. - Freshman)

The examples continue with the students communicating their motivation to assist others in a confusing time of their lives. One other student writes:

My main motivating factors for making a commitment to this team is the ability I have been granted to be able to help high school seniors who are lost and confused just as I was at that time of my life. When I came to SUU and met with one of the ambassadors, she helped me find clarity in my future decisions and that is exactly what I want to do for other students. I love this university and I want to help other students find their place here! (Emily S. – Freshman)

The opportunity that the program provides to interact and make sincere connections with future students was continually listed as a reason why these students have remained committed to the program. They are motivated by the light and direction they can provide to future students, just like a beacon does for those who may be lost.

Big Picture Perspective

The second major theme discovered in the student feedback was the motivation that comes from having a big picture perspective. This is defined by the students understanding that they are most successful at being an ambassador when they love what they do and what they are talking about, which in this case is Southern Utah University. There are several other goals and requirements of the program but by having an understanding of the big picture goal of sharing their genuine love for the institution, it serves as a motivator to them to get through the smaller details. Expressing commitment through this big picture perspective can also include; having a desire to complete the work, a desire to represent this university and giving full participation in order to show that commitment. This response collected illustrates this theme:

My main motivating factors are a love for SUU, the people here, the ambassador team, and being involved on campus. I have absolutely fallen in love with this school and I genuinely love talking about it to other people, especially not on a statistics side (which I love adding in) but more on how it has made me feel and impacted me emotionally, educationally and mentally. (Christain P. – Freshman)

Although the students are given talking points about the institution, nothing can take the place of a genuine love for the school, future students are able to feel when that is genuine and when it is just a sales pitch. Again applying the perspective to the work that is done in recruitment by assisting team members in finding a genuine love for what they do can foster commitment to the purpose. Other feedback that illustrates this theme are comments like, “*I just love SUU so freaking much, I want everyone to know about it!*” (Kennedy C. – Senior), or “*I am a T-Bird through and through, I have so much love for this university!*” (Brianna W. – Sophomore). The notion of being apart of something bigger than themselves fits perfectly into this theme, Sabrina K. who is a freshman from Salt Lake City says this:

I am most motivated to be a part of the team because I love representing what is important to me. Not only is that SUU, but being a part of something that is able to make a difference is a big factor in my commitment. I am very proud to be able to represent this institution.

It can be difficult to create this perspective in others but by providing opportunities to find an understanding of the big picture can be beneficial in creating commitment within student leaders.

Present Positive Qualities

The third theme present in the student's feedback regarding their commitment to the leadership program is the motivation to present positive qualities that they possess. This theme is defined by the desire of the students to display the type of characteristics that are deemed desirable to have in an employee, friend, co-worker, student, etc. These specific reasons focus on proving their commitment through these positive qualities they desire to possess, such as: dependability, giving the maximum effort, following through on commitments, exceeding expectations, displaying a positive attitude, good work ethic, or even the fear of disappointment from supervisors. In one student's feedback they mention, "*I feel committed because I value the work we do. I am motivated by the responsibility I have to follow through on what is expected of me and value the support system the team offers*" (Jennee M. – Graduate). Another student illustrates this theme by stating:

I feel that I need to take accountability regarding the commitment I made when I signed our contract. I never want to let anyone down so I make sure to complete every assignment and task that is given to me and be able to fulfill whatever I have agreed to do. (Jacob J. –Senior)

This theme denotes the good qualities that are hopefully already instilled within these students, however, when given additional responsibilities it is important for them to be held accountable. This accountability can provide added commitment and motivation, particularly when they feel an emotional connection to the people involved with the work. Leadership is not just about the task at hand but about training these students to be the best people they can be. This is illustrated by this student's feedback:

“The trust that was put in me by the advisors and staff motivates me to be the best ambassador I can be. I want to prove to them that choosing me was the best decision they could have made. I want to prove that to them and myself by having a positive attitude at events, giving my full effort during office and tour hours and being dependable throughout the semester and year” (Burgandy – Junior)

The inner sense of accountability and desire to be known as a successful and dependable individual can prove to be a great form of motivation for students to commit to their leadership programs.

Team Connection

Another major theme found within the data that inspires commitment in student leaders is the connections and relationships formed with other team members. This theme is defined by the network the students are able to create with the other student leaders, advisors, staff members, and the entire social circle that centers around the organization. This inspires students to feel commitment to the organization through the bonds of the fellow team members, since many of the required tasks do involve working with their close friends. It is also mentioned that the type of student that is selected for this leadership position is of a high caliber, so the friendships made are with good, hard working people that inspire each other to be their best selves. There are so many examples present within the text, such as this one from a freshman who just joined the team at the beginning of this academic year:

I am extremely committed to the ambassador program. At first I was only involved because of the scholarship, but my main motivating factors now are to help other students see how great SUU is and to become apart of our successful team

culture. The actual leadership experience gained by becoming part of this community that learns, serves and grows together is more valuable than any money. The love I have for my team is more than I ever imagined and worth more than anything that can be listed on a resume. (Dallin T. - Freshman)

These students spend a good amount of time working with each other and the culture of the organization promotes acceptance and getting to know their fellow team members. Although it is not a required piece of the contract, the friendships formed become a huge bonus to their involvement. Close bonds may not be established with every member of the team; however, being teammates provides a connection to all members. This is illustrated by this feedback:

I would say that I am completely committed to the Ambassador program. I truly look at this office as family. That means that if I have it and you need it, it's yours. I take time to get to know them and help when needed, even if it is with a flat tire or relationship advice, I want to support my team in everyway I can. (Jordan H. – Senior)

This can be a difficult theme to facilitate from a supervisor role since you cannot require that the students form these friendships, but it typically happens naturally as the students work with each other over the course of the year together. This organization works to celebrate all personality styles and promotes inclusion of all team members and prospective students. One student says this, *“The most motivating factor for me are my other team members. They are honestly made of gold and I value the love and confidence they give me”* (Bryce D. – Junior). The community that students are able to feel apart of can connect and commit students to any organization in an incredibly powerful way.

Personal Benefits

The final theme that was found within the research was that being apart of a leadership organization can bring benefits to the student in many individual ways. Although a lot of work is required of the students on behalf of the organization, their commitment to the program also gives back to them. This theme is defined by the positive benefits that team members can enjoy such as; higher productivity levels, leadership training provided, purpose and fulfillment in themselves, preparation for future careers, financial assistance, and overall happiness. This student illustrates this theme very well by stating:

My primary motivation is the community I am surrounded by. The other team members and advisors push me to be at my very best. I also consider the networking and involvement opportunities it provides and its benefits to my resume both professionally and as an overall human being. (Sara – Graduate).

The financial benefit is an obvious reason that many students are interested in joining, but the students who are solely focused on that typically do not stay committed to the team for very long. The work that is required is not worth the minimal scholarship if they do not find additional benefits of the program. This student's feedback is another example:

I am very committed to this team. I have been able to fulfill my goal of earning a bachelors degree because of the financial assistance of this program. More than that I have gained friendships and purpose. I eventually hope to go into a career focused in event management of some kind and this has been a great way to gain some experience and I have found my passion for that within this program.

(Andrea – Graduate)

Students who really enjoy the work that they are accomplishing within this program start to consider working in the higher education world after they graduate. Another student mentions, *“I have been the captain of sports teams, involved with student government, president of several clubs...but nothing has been more fulfilling for me than being an Ambassador”* (Keegan – Freshman). The benefits of being involved with a leadership organization can bring numerous benefits in a variety of ways to students who fully commit themselves to the program.

Based upon the themes discovered in the Theory of Communicated Commitment, several other resources and materials were created that will aid advisors in creating a culture of commitment within their student leadership organizations. Using the Presidential Ambassadors at Southern Utah University, new strategies were implemented into the organization to foster the commitment levels of its members. One resource that was produced was a “culture dashboard” (Appendix 1.1), which allows the current team members to visually grasp the work they have accomplished over the course of each semester. The dashboard tracks the progress of the established expectations of the members and also allows them able to see their progress relative to their teammates. The project also produced a student self-evaluation (Appendix 1.2) that was developed to help take stake of the overall organizational culture at the end of each semester. The self-evaluation was also utilized to collect the responses used for the Grounded Theory analysis. Another resource that the project produced is an organizational handbook that gives every member an overview of the team and assignments for them throughout the year (Appendix 1.3). This handbook includes the structure and leadership breakdown of

the organization, clear explanations of the expectations, contacts, calendars, etc. that serve to help every student succeed within the organization.

Discussion

The themes and results discovered within this newly established theory are important because they give insight into the motivating factors behind why student leaders stay committed to their organization. This knowledge is particularly beneficial to advisors or faculty members involved in student leadership organizations in any higher education setting. If advisors are able to understand what creates commitment in their students, they are able to facilitate trainings and expectations that will foster that attribute in its members. It is also important to note that the theory was developed from current student leaders responses; the answers were not coerced or artificial but authentic in their nature. This gives the feedback more validity since it was produced in a real world setting, within a current running leadership organization. The knowledge gained is also very adaptable to any team or organizational setting who desires to increase the commitment of its participants. By diligently striving to develop commitment within its members, organizations will undoubtedly create an environment and culture of high achievement.

Commitment is not always a trait that every student comes built with, however, it is essential to the success of any organization. Another point of significance for the future of any student leader is that commitment is a trait that will prove to be incredibly beneficial to them as they move forward into adulthood and their future careers. In fact, Fox Business reports that the first skill that employers are seeking today is the ability for an employee to commit to both their job and employer (Brooks, 2013). Dennis Boone,

former president and CEO of Verizon New Jersey and the current Director of Montclair State University's Entrepreneurship Center says this, "An employee committed to achieving their goals and objectives is a marvel to witness. I especially value the employee that, when times get tough, continues to strive for solutions instead of taking the easy way out and deserting their team" (Brooks, 2013). The more we can understand the motivating factors behind what creates this commitment in our students, the better we can facilitate the presence of those factors within our organizations.

An interesting insight gathered through the analysis of these self-evaluations from current student leaders is that in many of the answers provided, more than one of the listed themes were present in a single student's feedback. Meaning that the themes presented are mutually exclusive in their nature, however, one student could have several motivations for commitment that fall into each of the major themes. I recorded one student who listed four different reasons for their personal commitment that fell into four separate categories. Even more interesting, the student's who do list motivations in more than one theme tend to be some of the most committed of the entire group. I believe that this happens because if one motivation falters (which they most likely will do at times), they have other motivators to fall back on that continue to assist them in their commitment.

Limitations of the study might include the relationship that was present between the student leaders involved within the study and myself as the researcher. Seeing as I currently serve as the advisor to the Presidential Ambassador team, I have an intimate knowledge of who these students are and the work that they do for the ambassador organization. This may have had an impact on the feedback students were willing to

provide since they knew it would be reviewed by their supervisor. However, the students were provided instruction to be completely open and honest with their answers and no punishment was given for any negative responses. Another limitation could be that commitment is difficult to prove only through communication, it also requires that the student deliver with their actions in order to validate the arguments. It can be easy for a person to state that they are committed but much more difficult to prove commitment through their daily choices and actions. As the advisor to the program for over three years, I can provide insight that once a student's commitment has begun to waiver, it is displayed through both their communication choices and their actions. It is relatively easy to pinpoint when that time comes and I hope that through the foundation of trust built with each student that they could be honest with me and within their self-reflections. Also it is unrealistic to have every student be 100% committed 100% of the time, so this analysis is generalized to cover their entire semester of commitment to the team. Future research could include applying the theory to other organizations in different work environments that included all ages, organizational goals, etc. and assessing the success and outcomes.

Conclusion

Overall, the Theory of Communicated Commitment has provided new and interesting insights into the world of student leadership and the motivations behind the commitment within student involvement experiences. With the addition of the resources produced, this project can provide advisors and supervisors of student organizations with a foundation to build successful and committed cultures. Within every organization, there is a "culture" that is present, even if it has not been intentionally defined. By taking the steps to

understand the values, goals and attributes of an organizations' culture, supervisors are able to manually adjust the direction and intentions of the group.

By understanding more fully what helps the students within my organization stay committed, I have been able to deliberately facilitate a culture that supports those themes. Throughout this year within the Presidential Ambassador program, we have focused on identifying our organizations culture and I have been able to see an improvement in the understanding and commitment of the student leaders. The desired outcome of this project was to investigate more fully how students communicate their commitment to the organization and then to use that knowledge to produce a more committed organizational culture. This was accomplished through this project and is illustrated by the lack of turnover within the organization, the students' desire to move up and hold more responsibility in leadership roles, and the record-breaking enrollment numbers we have been able to produce. My hopes is that the knowledge gained through this project can also serve to help other organizations produce similar results in their student leaders and organizational cultures.

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Appendix A: Culture Dashboard



Appendix B: Student Self-Evaluation

Presidential Ambassador Self-Evaluation – SPRING 2018

Name: _____

Visits: _____

Flex Points Earned: _____

1. _____

Expected GPA: _____

2. _____

*This is a self-evaluation of your performance as an Ambassador throughout the past semester. The information gathered will be used to improve our program in the future, so please be completely open and honest with your answers. **Please read all the parts of each questions before you begin writing your answer, many of the questions have multiple parts – answer each question completely. PLEASE write legibly or type!***

NOTE: Please answer in complete grammatically correct sentences; NO yes or no answers!

1. Have you completed all expectations required of you for this semester? (Visits, Flex Points, Red Riots, etc.)
2. What do you feel has been your biggest contributions and/or talents that you brought to the team or school?
3. How do you feel about the success or effectiveness of our recruiting efforts? (Red Riots, off-site visits, campus tours, etc.)
4. How do you feel about overall team culture? What have you done to support or hinder this culture?
5. Describe your productivity and happiness levels over the course of the semester? What can be done to improve or help you be more productive and happy?
6. Give a couple suggestions of what could be done to improve recruitment, unity, or productivity efforts of this team? Get creative and think outside of the box.
7. Describe your commitment level to the Ambassador program. What are your main motivating factors for being part of this team?
8. Describe your relationship with your Committee Lead and the EC members? (Committee leads please describe your relationship with your committee and the EC)
9. How would you describe your relationship with your Advisor (Amie and your Regional Admission Counselor)?

In what ways can you Advisor (Amie and Regional Admission Counselor) improve?
10. Is there anything that you are not completely satisfied with or think I should be aware of? (uniforms, unity, time commitment, drama between members, trainings, etc.)

Appendix C: Organizational Handbook

Southern Utah University
Presidential Ambassadors 2017-2018
Handbook

Welcome to the Ambassador Family!

Congratulations on being selected to be a part of the 2017-2018 Presidential Ambassadors at Southern Utah University! Whether this is a returning year or your first, I want you all to really take advantage of the incredible opportunity that is yours for this upcoming year and I cannot wait to get to know each one of you and watch you grow and develop throughout the year.

This program has the ability to transform you into the best leader you can be; however, it will require your full commitment and dedication to its cause in order to get there. I absolutely believe that the more you put into this program, the more it will give back to you in return. Make no mistake that the skills you develop while being an ambassador will help you in numerous areas of your life after college. I hope you will appreciate this experience and make this year the best it can possibly be!

We are the front lines of this institution and the majority of the time, a student's first experience with SUU will come from someone in our Admissions family. We share the same goal; helping prospective students find their home here at Southern Utah University. We introduce them to campus, connect them with departments, and help them realize what this incredible place has to offer to students. It is our duty to do this institution justice by putting forth our best efforts at every opportunity we have with future students and their families. As an ambassador, you are the face of this institution and the job you do directly affects the reputation of SUU.

It will be difficult to beat what we have been doing for the last few years, but I know we can if we really focus and continually commit to going the extra mile. We have a strong tradition of excellence to uphold and I will expect nothing less for the year ahead. You are all incredible people and this program and university is lucky to claim you. I cannot wait to grow and develop alongside each one of you.

I love you all...Don't forget it! GO TBIRDS!

Amie Tukuafu

| Executive Council | | Committee Leads |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| President | Taylor Leavitt | Vanessa Kirkby |
| VP Tours | Brie Ward | Bryce Drawe |
| VP Involvement | Zach McNaughtan | Mercedes Gale |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| VP Events | Amanda Evans Brecklee Gale | Macey Widdison |
| Group Tour Coordinator | Tanner Greenhalgh | Ryan Leonard |
| Recruitment VP | Julia Rainey | Bailee Walker |
| Unity VP | Kennedy Cowan | Dani Ward |

LIST OF COMMITTEES

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p><u>Vanessa Kirkby</u> Julia Rainey Tanner Greenhalgh Brooke Paulson Landon Ross Mikey Savage Hadley Cowan Oscar Jeppson</p> | <p><u>Bryce Drawe</u> Taylor Leavitt Logan Platt Dallin Tripp Alexa Willeford Karlysn Madsen Weston Allinson Paige Bowler</p> | <p><u>Mercedes Gale</u> Brecklee Gale Morgan Day Jaden AhQuin Christian Parkinson Alex Hawks Peyton Munson Keegan Reed</p> | <p><u>Macey Widdison</u> Zach McNaughtan Maranda Martinez Kolton Pierson Ashley Broadhead Abby Nakken Emily Schut Jordan Holiman</p> |
|--|---|--|--|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p><u>Ryan Leonard</u> Kennedy Cowan Olivia Johnson Andrew Leavitt Dominique Gousse Sabrina Kim Cameron Cox</p> | <p><u>Bailee Walker</u> Brie Ward Sabrina Embry Omar Maravilla Randon Coleman Jaxynn Smith Austin Francis Kylee Minson</p> | <p><u>Dani Ward</u> Amanda Evans Ana Maguire Tanner Gale Jacob Kohler Tatym Anderson Tate Douglas</p> |
|--|--|--|

EC Returners Transfer/Current Student RM's Rookies

Weekly Commitment:

Each Ambassador will be required to complete and report that they attended each of their weekly commitments to the VP of Involvement, Zach McNaughtan. This will be done by checking in at the front desk. The weekly commitment will include:

- 1 – Tour Hour
- 1 – Office Hour
- 1 – Meeting on Wednesdays @ 4 [PE 128] **BE ON TIME**

Office and tour hours will be assigned the first week of classes, and by the third week they will be final. Office and Tour hours are 1 hour per week, so for the both of them you will spend 2 hours in the Welcome Center per week. If you are unable to attend either your tour or office hour, it is your responsibility to switch or get it covered by another ambassador. You are required to stay in the office during your Tour and Office hours, even if we do not have something specific you are working on, unless otherwise given permission. Homework will then be an option for you to do with permission from Amie, Paula, and Office staff.

Our weekly meetings take place on Wednesday at 4:00 PM inside the J.L Sorenson PE Building room 128. Meetings are scheduled from 4:00 PM to 5:30 PM. This means meeting are 1.5 hours long. Do not plan anything during this time (especially intramural sports) because it is essential every member of our team is in attendance to receive everyone's opinions and perspectives. This is the one time a week when we have our whole team together. We will cover event training, leadership training, tour training, announcements, and anything else that takes place during the year. Plan on being there for the entire time!!

Total each ambassador is contracted for 3.5 hours per week.

Priority High School Visits:

Every Ambassador has been assigned priority high schools. It is your responsibility to communicate with the SUU Admission Counselor assigned to your high schools during the school year. Everybody should only be assigned one SUU Admissions Counselor. Transfer ambassadors will be assigned one high school and their transfer school. You are required to visit **two schools per semester**. Visits are not limited to the Priority High Schools assigned to you, however one visit each semester must be to at least one of your Priorities. Our hope is that you will visit different schools each semester or the school where you can personally make the biggest impact.

Any additional visits will be worth flex points determined by the distance traveled. However, you will not be setting up these additional visits. Please get in contact with the SUU Admissions Counselor over that school to set that up and you will carry out the visit. (This means you can do visits on your own, however they must be approved through your SUU Admissions Counselor.

Recruitment Ideas:

As you visit different schools it is important to plan effective ways to communicate with students. However, you will not always simply set up a table during a lunch visit. We have a lot of things at our disposal in the PA supply closets so see what we have and get creative. Here are some other options of things you can do to make visits different while maintaining our recruitment goals and making it enjoyable for students.

- Half court shot contest at a basketball game
- Give out Thunder-cheese!! (quesadillas with thor on them)

- Football Tailgate with games and SWAG
- Morning visit with donuts or pancakes

Tour Requirements:

Ambassadors will follow proper and professional tour protocol by:

- Arriving to your tour hour 10 minutes before tour time (Or come straight from your previous class if you have one before you hour.)
- Arriving 5 minutes after you assigned hour is considered late and you will be given a flex point.
- Following the appropriate dress code with name tag (See DRESS CODE BELOW)
- Having a cheerful attitude.

Before giving a tour, every ambassador will go through the tour certification process. Everyone must be certified by September 15, 2017. This includes:

1. Watch the tour presentation
2. Passing the tour certification test
3. Shadow two tours with signatures
4. Give a tour to a returning ambassador with signature
5. Give a tour to an EC member with signature

*Returning ambassadors (those that were ambassadors in 2016-2017) must complete only steps 1, 2, and 4.

Tours will be tracked per ambassador. This will help even out who is giving tours each week. Everyone will be assigned a number. That number will be yours for the entire semester. Numbers will rotate each week and that will correspond with who has to give tours each hour. (This is only if there is a smaller amount of tours than Ambassadors in that hour. If there is an equal or more amount, everyone will be giving a tour.) Tours are part of your weekly duty and as such you must treat it that way. Be professional any/all times when inside the Welcome Center. If you have any questions about tours please contact Brie Ward.

Group Tours:

Each week during our ambassador class, Tanner Greenhalgh will ask for volunteers to sign up for group tours. Group tours are large tours that have been scheduled in advance that usually require many tour guides. Signing up for a group tour will earn you one flex point. Signing up for a Group Tour Leader or Game Day Tour will earn you two flex points.

Group Tour Leader: The first person to sign-up for any group tour will be assigned the Group Tour Leader and will be in charge of the tours. Basically, the GTL makes sure the tour runs smoothly as possible since Tanner can't be at every single tour. The following are the responsibilities of the GTL:

- Contact all signed up Ambassadors the day of the group tour as a reminder.

- Take attendance at the tour to make sure all tour guides are present
- Make sure all signed up tour guides are aware of the starting and ending point of the tour
- Take charge of the tour and be the first contact with the visiting group. Let them know that you are in charge of the tour.
- Split the group into equal sizes and assign each subgroup a tour guide.
- Be the last tour guide to leave on the tour.
- Be sure to thank the group for visiting SUU!

Game Day Tours: These are tours we give to athletes before their games on Saturday. Primarily prospective football players. We always drop the players back off at the field and then all tour guides can go straight to the tailgates we have.

- Game day tours are all on Saturdays thus they are worth 2 flex points
- They will not have a GTL since a football coach usually is there to take charge
- You may be touring buildings we don't traditionally tour such as the Harris Center and Football Facilities.

Not showing up for a group tour you signed up for will result in a flex point being added. If you do sign up and can no longer make that tour it is YOUR responsibility to find someone to cover it. If you do get it covered you will not be given a flex point.

Any questions about group tours should be directed to Tanner.

Expectations & Responsibilities:

Grades: Every ambassador must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0. If it falls below a 3.0, a meeting must be scheduled with Amie and Taylor. You will be placed on probation for the following semester. You will still be required to complete all of your ambassador responsibilities, however your grades will be re-evaluated at the end of the semester. If you have not raised your GPA above a 3.0, we will no longer be able to offer you a position or scholarship as a Presidential Ambassador. There are no exceptions. This is a University Rule that works through our Financial Aid office. Amie cannot bend the rules for anyone.

Flex Points:

Being a Presidential Ambassador at Southern Utah University is a big deal. Two words describe why, amazing culture. Brian Chesky, CEO, of Airbnb said, "Culture is simply a shared way of doing something with a passion." You along with every member of this team share the desire to Learn, Serve, and Grow. You will learn all you can about SUU, prospective students, and fellow team members in order to serve more effectively in every sphere of your life. Learning and serving will lead to growth. Members of this team help grow the university, grow relationships, and make strides in your own personal growth.

A system has been created to allow both flexibility and accountability in your passions to learn, serve, and grow. On top of the weekly commitment, every ambassador will be required to complete **15 flex points** over the course of each semester. These can be earned by signing up for additional activities like open houses, group tours, additional high school visits, etc. These cannot be earned at any required events such as: Tour hours, office hours, Red Riots, 2 High School visits. You will start with 0 flex points and work your way up to 15. You will be responsible for reporting any flex points you earn through the weekly culture survey. **Surveys are due every Wednesday by 11:59 PM during the semester regardless of if you earned flex points or not. NO EXCEPTIONS.** If you don't submit your survey on time, you will not receive the flex points you earned that week and you will be given one warning per semester. Subsequent failures to submit the survey on time will result in your flex point requirement being increased by one point per failure to submit. Flex points will be verified and check for accuracy. This is a culture of honesty and hard work. Not earning all 15 flex points will result in a half letter grade drop for each flex point not earned. Those not enrolled in the PA class will still be evaluated if all flex points were not earned. Membership within the team is based on a culture where you want to get flex points done because you love what we do therefore, if you don't complete your requirement your place in the team becomes negotiable for the next semester or year.

Flex Points Earned: Start at 0 -- Earn 15*

| # of Flex Points | Reasons (NOT during office hour) |
|------------------|---|
| +1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Covering, NOT SWITCHING, someone's tour or office hour - Stuffing for one hour - Visiting a school in Cedar or 60 miles radius of Cedar E.g. Visiting Saint George or Beaver - Helping prep for an event (NOT day of event and can't be your event) - Group Tours - Calling lists (NOT office hours) |
| +2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visiting a school in Utah outside of Cedar 60 mile radius - Visiting a school in Vegas area - Being group tour leader - Game Day Tours/Saturday tours |
| +3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visiting a school farther than Utah/Vegas - Overnight fairs |

If you are visiting multiple schools on the same day/trip, it is the standard number of flex points for first visit and 1 flex point for every school after that.

Flex Points Added Onto Requirement Total:

| # of Flex Points | Reasons |
|------------------|--|
| +1 | - Not getting your tour or office hour covered/switched - Excused missed event/meeting (This means even if Amie okayed if you will still get a flex point added on for not meeting your weekly requirements.) - Being more than 5 minutes late after the hour three times - Missing or not getting a group tour covered. - Being sent home from an assigned hour due to dress code |
| +2 | - Unexcused missed meeting |
| +3 | - Unexcused missed event - Missing any Ambassador retreat |

*Flex Point Requirements can be increased from 15 for reasons mentioned in the above table.

**Other opportunities may be available but must be approved by VP of Involvement or Amie

***Amount of flex points subject to change

Any questions about Flex Points should be directed to the VP of Involvement.

Culture Survey: The Culture survey populates the Nestrics dashboard with data. The data helps our nest learn, serve, and grow. The dashboard is available to all team members and will help you see your progress as an individual and our progress as a team. We have a team flex goal to accomplish 1,000 flex points as a team per semester. That is only 19 flex points per team member! **If we accomplish the goal as a team we will do a super, crazy, awesome activity.** All team members who complete 19 flex points will be rewarded regardless of whether the team completes the flex goal or not.

Dress Code: Every ambassador must follow the dress code for ALL ambassador events.

- Tour/Office hours: Professional dress. Ambassador Polo, nametags, slacks, dress shoes, professional skirts, etc. All pants and skirts **MUST BE BLACK**. Absolutely no other color or crazy patterns. Men must be in dress pants, no jeans!!
- Casual Uniform: Black National Guard Polo, jeans and name tag.
- Red Riots: Dress Code will be addressed before each RED RIOT. Shaylee will go over it in class with the detailed agenda.
- No apparel from another college or university (in-state or out of state) may be worn on campus, at an event, or posted on social media.

If you are sent home from an event, tour hour, or office hour due to dress code a flex point will be added since you have not met your duties. If it is at all

questionable, DON'T wear it. We will be cracking down on dress code this year! If there is a specific piece of clothing you aren't sure about, come into the office on your own free time (not during an assigned hour) and run it past Amie.

Traveling: When making a high school visit, Paula will schedule you a motor pool vehicle to take. Do not schedule it on your own. All motor pool goes through Paula. Fill out the paperwork found in the Welcome Center Storage Room (168 L behind the black wrapped door) and leave it in on Paula's desk. **This needs to be done at least 10 days before the visit.** Please note that taking your own vehicle is the LAST OPTION. You will need to provide a sufficient reason why you can't take a motor pool vehicle, which has to be cleared through Paula. You will not be reimbursed if you are late scheduling a vehicle and Motor Pool doesn't have any left. Please plan ahead. Everyone must be motor pool certified to drive a school vehicle. Taylor will let you know whether or not you are certified and how to certify. This must be completed by September 15, 2017. We will do this during office hours.

Office Etiquette: Please remember that our office is a professional atmosphere. Please act accordingly while in the office.

- Keep the volume level low. This is very important when an office worker is using the phone.
- Don't hang out in the front area. (Use the PA office.)
- Don't hang out in Admission Counselors offices. Yes, they are our friends and we love them but they also have jobs to do and constant visits distract them from reaching our goals.
- Keep food and homework in the PA office or kitchen.
- CLEAN UP THE PA OFFICE EVERYTIME YOU LEAVE

General Rules: These are the general rules of being a Presidential Ambassador at Southern Utah University. If you feel you are unable to keep these rules let us know right now. Amie reserves the right to take away your position and scholarship at any time if these rules are not followed.

- Love SUU. This job requires a passion for SUU and being a Thunderbird. This should be evident in your effort and work.
- Absolutely no posting on any type of social media of illegal activity. This includes drug use and underage drinking. Be smart. You are representing SUU to the public.
- You may not wear any attire associated with another college or university on campus EVER. It doesn't matter if it is an in-state school or out-of-state, they are all direct competition. Additionally, no posts on social media that affiliate yourself with another college or university. (This includes sporting events supporting other teams such as: U of U, BYU, etc.)
- You must be a positive influence on society, our campus, and our organization. We don't tolerate students getting in trouble with law enforcement, campus police, or inter-organizational problems.

Events:

Shaylee Lamoreaux is our Event Coordinator. Any questions, concerns, or complaints should be brought to her or her VPs, Amanda and Brecklee, immediately. Event training will take place on Sept. 6th during PA Meeting. This is mandatory and not worth a flex point. Shaylee and Paula will run the trainings on our office, pop-ups, and all other things associated with events. This is essential that every ambassador attends a training session because the objects we use for events are worth a LOT of money. For example, our new 20 foot display cost almost \$4000. The training will last approximately one to two hours in time.

Each committee is assigned a date for their RED RIOT. They are listed below. Mark your calendars:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Red Riots | October 13-14: Bryce's Committee |
| | November 3-4: Macey's Committee |
| | November 17-18: Ryan's Committee |
| | January 19-20: Dani's Committee |
| | February 2-3: Mercedes Committee |
| | February 16-17: Bailee's Committee |
| | March 23-24: Vanessa's Committee |
| The Call: Leadership Weekend | March 2-3: Executive Council |

