

Study assesses college leadership training programs

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How effective are college programs designed to train the next generation of leaders?

A new study from psychologists at Rice University found they teach students about leadership, but additional measures are needed to evaluate

how they impact students' real-life leadership skills.

"The state of higher education leadership development program evaluation: A meta-analysis, critical review and recommendations" will appear in an upcoming edition of *The Leadership Quarterly*. The study evaluates literature from 1951 to 2018 about leadership development programs, focusing on higher education programs for students. It also examines current evaluation methods used by these programs.

"We were particularly interested in higher education programs because so many universities offer some form of leadership development for their students," said Denise Reyes, a [graduate student](#) in Rice's Department of Psychological Sciences and the study's lead author. "Also, the [student](#) population is unique in that many students have little to no previous leadership experience, so we wanted to know what specific design and delivery methods were best suited for developing leaders at this stage."

The researchers said their analysis suggests students learn quite a lot from those programs, with students showing a 19% increase in knowledge about leadership topics. The analysis also showed students who participated in these programs were better leaders in real life.

But the analysis also revealed that the evaluation process for leadership development programs is oftentimes lacking. The problem is that the assessment of what most students learn and the real-life impact of their training comes from self-reporting rather than a test of actual knowledge, the researchers said.

The researchers plan to do further research on design, delivery and implementation elements needed for [leadership](#) development programs. They hope the study will improve those programs in higher [education](#).

More information: Denise L. Reyes et al, The state of higher education leadership development program evaluation: A meta-analysis, critical review, and recommendations, *The Leadership Quarterly* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101311](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101311)

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