

# ***Student Autophotography of Perceived Leadership Competency Development during a Short-Term Domestic Study Tour***

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## **Abstract**

*Many higher educational institutions offer existing travel abroad study experiences. On the rise are short-term domestic travel experiences with the large cultural diversity present in the United States. As accessibility to study abroad programming is continuously faced with barriers such as cost, perceived safety, opportunity cost, and language, could domestic study programs offer equitable alternatives? With leadership experience being a necessary and sought after skill by students and employers, to what capacity does domestic travel provide participants leadership development? This autophotography study utilized photo-caption data to investigate the perceived leadership competencies developed by state FFA officers during a short-term domestic travel experience. Participant photo-caption responses communicated limited leadership competency development. Rather, participants conflated agricultural experiential exposure and gained social capital as perceived leadership competency development. Recommendations include developing leadership curriculum grounded in theory for both domestic and abroad travel experiences, front loading leadership competency development goals to participants, introducing post-trip interviews in future studies, and replicating the study within a global context in a travel experience abroad to understand perceptions beyond a domestic experience.*

## **Introduction, Literature Review, & Context of Study**

With the increasing globalization of agriculture, job candidates with cultural literacy and study abroad experience have increased employability (Deardorff, 2006; Eaton & Kleshinski, 2014; Harder et al., 2015; Sisavath, 2002). As complex issues arise in the agricultural, food, fiber, and natural resources industry, the need to develop leadership competencies within domestic and global contexts can ensure such challenges are managed (Deardorff, 2006; Quirk, 2018). Study abroad experiences are one of many supplementary learning opportunities for students to view real-life applications of agriculture, gain industry knowledge, identity development, personal growth, and cultural competency (Cheng, 2013; Huffman et al., 2020; Matteucci et al., 2019). Short-term study abroad (STSA) experiences can offer educational

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opportunities to students in a cost and time effective approach to study abroad opposed to traditional, long-term options (Bunch et al., 2018). STSA programs aid students searching for a career within agriculture to be better prepared for a rapidly changing workplace by recognizing social responsibilities, emphasizing employability, unstructured development of soft skills, and increasing cultural awareness (Vetter & Wingenbach, 2019). Many STSA programs intend to expand technical knowledge within a variety of agricultural sectors, foster personal growth, develop cultural awareness among students, and expand global attitudes (Bunch et al., 2018; Smith, 2013). Although efforts to develop global leadership competencies exist for STSA programs, few studies explore developing global leadership competencies within agriculture as a result of a STSA experience (Quirk, 2018).

While STSA offers many benefits to participants, these programs are not accessible to all students with barriers to international travel for students including financial strain, global events, language, opportunity costs, and perceived safety (Edgar & Edgar, 2018; Vernon et al., 2017; Wingenbach et al., 2006). The question is posed: can domestic travel experiences produce similar outcomes to STSA experiences, and could they prove to be an equitable alternative? Expanding one's personal perspectives and worldview, promoting deeper cultural understanding, and gaining knowledge in a specific field of study can occur during a domestic study tour (Gomez-Lanier, 2017). Some domestic study tours related to leadership development in the agricultural industry exist to enhance the knowledge and skills of participants as leaders in agricultural spaces (Radford, 2020). Various adult agricultural leadership programs seek to develop networks among participants, strengthen engage in global and domestic issues, expose participants to diverse agricultural practices, and connect with those in policy and other government officials. Agricultural study tours within these programs provide participants with opportunities to be effective within leadership roles (Kaufman et al., 2012; Radford, 2020).

Annually, the National FFA Organization hosts the International Leadership Seminar for State Officers (ILSSO). Traditionally, this experience is held abroad for state FFA officers between the ages of 17 and 20. A state FFA officer is a student leader elected to represent the FFA organization at the state level, promoting agricultural education, leadership, and personal development among FFA members. As a result of ILSSO, participants should be able to demonstrate knowledge of global values and diversity, create a plan to articulate and interpret learning to constituents, and formulate empathy and awareness of domestic and global conditions (National FFA Organization, 2022). ILSSO was planned to take place in Costa Rica, for 2022. Due to international travel restrictions and the COVID-19 pandemic, the trip destination pivoted domestically to the state of California, creating a domestic study tour experience with similar intended goals, within a domestic context. Participants from across the United States (U.S) were engaged in learning about production agriculture, agricultural policy, and natural resources in the state of California through a facilitated immersion experience.

When focusing on global leadership development in students, intentionally designing program tools to assess student development should be a priority to create meaningful transformations (Quirk, 2018). Presently, some research exists on the development of leadership competencies as result of short-term domestic study tour experience (Humphrey et al., 2023; Radford, 2020): perceived expanded relationships with fellow participants, conflation of technical agricultural industry knowledge as a leadership competency, varied perspectives of domestic cultural experiences, and changed perspectives around alternative agricultural production methods were found by Humphrey et al. (2023). We were interested to see if using participant-selected photos through autophotography provided insight into experiences representative of participant field experience (Nolan, 2006; Scott et al., 2023). The understanding of perceived leadership competency development through short-term domestic travel experience is necessary to the development of student travel programs (Montgomery & Arensdorf, 2012). Understanding participants' perceived leadership competency development as a result of short-term domestic study tour is needed to better align program objectives and outcomes to improve the effectiveness of such programs in the future and understand which specific experiences are perceived meaningful by participants.

### **Purpose & Guiding Question**

The purpose of this study was to explore how state FFA officers used autophotography to express the perceived leadership competencies developed through a short-term domestic study tour experience. To guide our research, we asked: how do state FFA officers express their leadership development during the ILSSO experience?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual frameworks of Social Capital (Coleman, 1988) and Global Perspective (Hanvey, 1982) illuminated meaning in the findings. According to Coleman (1988), the benefits and resources we receive from social relationships are Social Capital. Although it is rarely stated as a primary objective, the development of social capital among participants is often a secondary outcome of leadership development experiences (Van De Valk, 2008). The development of social capital through shared experiences may exist as the creation of obligations and expectations among group members, the sharing of information, and the evolution of new social norms within the group (Coleman, 1988).

Social capital is rooted in two distinct relationships, explicit connections, and implicit affinities. Explicit connections relate to a shared purposive action, where participants are aware of the explicit connections between individuals (Dewey et al., 2011; Smith & Giraud-Carrier, 2010). In the case of this study, explicit connection is a shared travel experience through a domestic study tour. An implicit affinity relates participants through shared similarities such as attitudes, hobbies, or interests (Smith & Giraud-Carrier, 2010; Dewey et al., 2011). In this study we contribute implicit affinities to participants unique roles as state FFA officers, students, and a shared interest in agriculture. Explicit connections and implicit affinities help us better understand participants' perceived development through participation in a domestic study tour, and how it may implicate future student domestic study tours. We may also consider students projected motivations for participation in a domestic study tour. Motivations include goal-oriented motivations, relating to educational and career aspirations; social oriented motivations, relating social dimensions such as the potential to expand the participants' network; and learning-oriented motivations, grounded in a participant's curiosity to gain new knowledge and experiences (Roberts et al., 2020).

Hanvey's (1982) concept of Global Perspective provides five dimensions of a global perspective that young people engaged in formal and informal educational programs can attain. Cross-cultural awareness, one dimension identified by Hanvey (1982), focuses on young people's ability to recognize and empathize with globally diverse ideas and practices and how one's own cultural norms may compare. In this study, global perspective helped us understand how the participants conceptualized their exposure to new, diverse ideas and practices through the domestic study abroad experience and reconciled it with their previous lived experiences and cultural norms.

### **Methodology**

This research was part of a larger qualitative case study from Oklahoma State University, which focused on the perceived leadership competencies developed by state FFA officers from their participation in a 10-day domestic study tour. This study primarily employed autophotography, a visual methodology in qualitative research (Flick, 2009; Glaw et al., 2017; Latz, 2017). Visual methodologies, like autophotography, are used in ethnographic research and provide participants with a tool to express themselves through their selection of representative photos (Flick, 2009; Glaw et al., 2017; Noland, 2006). Through autophotography, participants capture photos from their experiences and provide summaries of why those photos are important to them. Photos are a snapshot of participants' perceptions from that selected place and time; they chose "that sight from an infinity of other possible sights...the photographer's

way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject” (Berger, 1972, p. 10). The analysis of the captions and photos are guided by interpretive methodology (Glaw et al., 2017), which can be subjective to researchers’ perspectives; thus, this is a limitation of the study.

## Participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify study participants (Creswell, 2013). The population of interest included college-aged students, between 17 and 20 years old, elected to serve as state FFA officers within their respective states who also attended ILSSO in January 2022 ( $N = 46$ ). Permission to study this experience was granted by the National FFA Organization, Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the 42 participants from whom we obtained consent and/or assent. The research participants represented 17 U.S. states, with no participants attending from the state of California. A majority of the participants self-identified as female ( $n = 28$ ), with the remaining self-identifying as male ( $n = 14$ ).

## Data Collection and Analysis

Photos were collected from participants via Qualtrics submission at the end of the domestic study tour experience. Participants were given the opportunity to select and submit between three to five photos captured during the experience. Three prompts were provided to participants for selecting and uploading their photos. The first prompt asked participants to select up to two photos representative of the leadership competencies they developed throughout the ILSSO experience. The second prompt asked participants to select up to two photos representing the leadership competencies they feel are needed in agriculture, both domestically and globally. The final prompt asked participants to upload the photo representative of the most impactful learning experience from their participation in ILSSO. After each photo upload, participants were asked to caption the photo with a description of why it was selected and how they felt it was representative of the prompt. In total, 127 captioned photos were collected from participants and included in the analysis. Participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

While photos can be a rich source of primary qualitative data from which to interpret participants’ perspectives, they are often triangulated with other data sources (Flick, 2009). Other sources of triangulated data included: (a) pre-experience reflection statements; (b) post-experience reflection statements; (c) post-experience focus group interviews; (d) researcher observations; and (e) trip artifacts and documents. Pre- and post-experience statements were hand-written by participants and transcribed electronically by the researchers. Observations were conducted by one researcher who attended the experience and kept journal notes.

It is common for the text descriptions accompanying visual data to be analyzed before the visual material (Flick, 2009). While photos can serve as a symbolic, concrete representation of what is important to the participant, the photo captions serve as the abstract, conceptualized meaning around the photo and participants’ experiences (Latz, 2017; Noland, 2006). The linguistic data (i.e., photo captions) were analyzed using the constant comparative method, which is common for narrated photo research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Latz, 2017). The process began with open coding, where line-by-line analysis was conducted by one researcher to establish a set of open codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The open codes were then discussed, negotiated, and condensed by the researcher team. Next, the photos were examined alongside their accompanying captions, which provided symbolic, contextual evidence aiding in establishment and confirmation of overarching themes (Latz, 2017). All other sources of data were used for data triangulation. Finally, five themes were confirmed by the researchers, with representative photos (one or two per theme) and captions selected for reporting of findings.

## Rigor, Trustworthiness, and Researcher Reflexivity

The considerations for establishing qualitative rigor and trustworthiness recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used: (a) credibility, (b) confirmability, (c) dependability, and (d) transferability. Specific practices included researcher and data triangulation (Creswell, 2013), researcher audit trailing, multiple data checks which consisted of bi-weekly meetings with the authorship team that led to inter-coder agreement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), reflective bracketing to minimize researcher biases (Tufford & Newman, 2010), the inclusion of reflexive statements (Ary et al., 2010; Tracy, 2010), the implementation of thorough qualitative methodology, and the presentation of rich data descriptions (Stake, 1978).

To accurately present the findings of this study, biases, context, and the experience must be properly acknowledged to uphold the sincerity and quality of research (Tracy, 2010). Each member of the research team participated in an abroad ILSSO experience previously and were familiar with the program. One member was invited by the National FFA Organization to co-lead the 2022 ILSSO experience.

### Limitations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILSSO experience pivoted from abroad to a domestic experience and encountered many unforeseen itinerary changes during the trip. As a result, participants and their perceptions in this study are not reflective of the entirety of ILSSO participants since the program's inception. This domestic ILSSO experience began with a presentation emphasizing agricultural advocacy from the California Secretary of Agriculture and other political leaders and stakeholders of the California agriculture industry. It is noted this may have inherently biased participants' learning focus and personal reflections during the trip as advocacy was the focus of the presentations early on in the experience. Also, photo-caption data were collected entirely via Qualtrics submission. All photo-caption data were used while interpreting data, but given the mode lacked contextual depth and limited the meaning we could infer. We did not interpret the photos detached from the participants' written captions, nor did we conduct follow-up interviews with participants to expand and provide context to the photo captions.

### Findings

Four themes related to perceived leadership competency development as result of the short-term domestic study tour emerged from the autophotography data: a) *agriculture industry exposure*; b) *interpersonal traits*; c) *heightened awareness of own leadership*; and d) *expansion of social capital*. Findings with supporting photos and captions are provided for each theme.

#### Theme #1: Agriculture Industry Exposure

The most expected result of a short-term agricultural trip is the increase in agriculture industry exposure (Figure 1). Participants had about 20 direct agricultural industry exposures and experiential learning opportunities. These opportunities varied by agricultural sector and included: ranching, aquaculture, fungi-culture, hydroponics, horticulture, agri-tourism, and viticulture.

#### Figure 1

*Agriculture Industry Exposure Photos: Dairy Farm (left), Oyster Growing Operation (right).*



*Note.* Photo (left) caption: “Connection to earth, agriculture, and the environment is universal and cooperative. Every state can connect to nature, animals, and food.” Photo (right) caption: “I learned the most at Hog Island Oysters because it’s so unlike any form of agriculture I’d ever experienced before.”

Participants shared motivation for attending the short-term domestic study tour, which included gaining a broader understanding of agriculture. Cindy shared in their caption, “Before coming to California, my goal was to learn more about the areas of agriculture I did not know much about. . . . Amongst our visits we visited several livestock operations and aquaculture facilities.” Many participants also shared the value they saw in witnessing new agricultural practices they had previously never seen. Shaye echoed this thought by sharing, “I learned the most at Hog Island Oysters because it’s so unlike any form of agriculture I’d ever experienced before.” There is hesitation in stating knowledge-gain resulting from this experience. These agriculture experiences merely exposed participants to different agriculture concepts at the surface level. Knowledge was not assessed during the trip, and most participants did not report the application of gained knowledge post-trip.

While post-trip application was not reported, the autophotography data reflected the importance of advocacy as a tool for the longevity of agriculture (Figure 2). Many participants claimed a background and basic knowledge of agriculture. This prior experience contributed to personal motivation for advocacy efforts. Many participants felt their participation in the short-term domestic study tour exposed them to innovative ideas and viewpoints around agricultural policy and practices, furthering their present advocacy abilities. Billie shared this opinion by stating in their photo caption, “With a better understanding of agriculture coast to coast I can advocate for all sides of agriculture and have correct and valuable information when speaking to other individuals about [agriculture].”

## Figure 2

*Advocacy Value Photograph: Wrapped Floral Bouquets.*



*Note.* Photo caption: “When we went to the local farmers market in San Francisco. . .the vendors were very willing to talk and have open conversations about their products. . .From this interaction I learned how meaningful a conversation can be and how important it is to advocate for agriculture.”

Other participants shared thoughts of ILSSO serving as a reinforcement and reminder to advocate for agriculture, agricultural education, and the National FFA Organization. From their experience on the trip, Marley shared in their caption, “this is a classroom at Santa Barbra County CTE Center. This picture serves as a reminder that, for [everyone] to be able to understand and support agriculture, we must be advocates for it.” Many participants shared the value they found in the experiences throughout the trip, citing the personal motivation it instilled within them. Trip components included meeting with the California Secretary of Agriculture and a presentation from the USDA. In these experiences, participants were exposed to the idea of advocacy and the importance of government roles in agriculture. Participants shared that they valued these opportunities and continued to refer to how the owners and producers of the operations they toured advocated for their business and the industry.

### Theme #2: Interpersonal Traits and Skills

The second theme largely present in the photo-caption data was the culmination of various interpersonal traits (Figure 3). Three sub-themes became apparent under the overarching theme of interpersonal traits: a) *open mindedness*, b) *social skills*, and c) *expansion of comfort zone*.

### Figure 3

*Interpersonal Trait and Skills Photos: Seedling (left), Guided Industry Tour Speaker (right).*



*Note.* Photo (left) caption: “This photo shows the active listening skills I used [and] grew during this trip. I took every chance I could to grow my knowledge of agriculture and to learn more about the plant industry as I am more of a livestock person.” Photo (right) caption: “Those photos of the visit I had the hardest time

at. The tour guide had a lot of strong opinions about things I didn't agree with and challenged me to grow as a leader and become more open minded to new and different ideas.”

The expansion of open mindedness during the trip was mentioned most in participant photo captions. Most participants shared this expansion in the context of culture and agricultural practices. While summarizing a photo of a vineyard, Nina shared,

I selected this photo to represent my leadership competencies through this trip because this trip helped me become a more [open-minded] leader. This vineyard was organic and biodynamic which questioned agriculture practices I had past considered correct. It allowed me to open myself up to [new] ideas so I can present all the facts to those in my state.

While captioning a photo of participants trying seafood, Ivon shared their perspective of being open minded to new cultural experiences by saying,

Open-mindedness is not only necessary to experience new cultures and foods, but rather to better understand new perspectives and people that you may come into contact with. A true leader has an open mind to all experiences and points of view to point those around him to the best solution that they could attain.

The development of social skills was represented as another sub-theme in the data. Participants shared the social skills they developed assisted in their roles as state officers and interaction with audiences like FFA members, stake holders, industry professionals, and other state officers. Examples shared of developed social skills included active listening and living in the moment. Candace shared, “Parts of this trip reminded me of the value of listening instead of interjecting when faced with concepts that do not align with my own worldview. I am reminded that listening offers opportunity for perspective.”

The last sub-theme shared was the expansion of participant comfort zones. Comfort zone expansion was referred to most often in the context of interaction with new people and not due to new cultural experiences or knowledge gained. Santana captioned, “This trip pushed me to interact and be pushed outside my comfort zone for the better in many ways. Including learning how to communicate better with my peers and adults.” Participants shared much about these interpersonal traits and skills in their photo captions; however, in post-trip statements and focus group interviews, participants never shared confirmation of using these gained traits and skills post-trip.

### **Theme #3: Heightened Awareness of Own Leadership**

Photo-caption data revealed a heightened awareness of leadership during the short-term domestic study tour (Figure 5). Participants did not refer to any specific leadership competencies developed as a result of the experience but rather referred to broad foundational leadership concepts.

#### **Figure 4**

*Leadership Awareness: Participants Posing in Front of State Capital.*



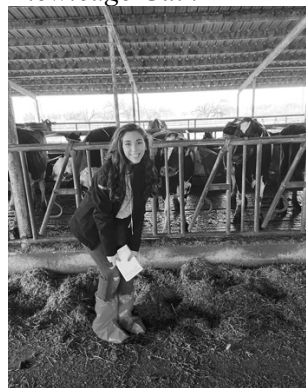
*Note.* Photo caption: “I selected this photo because I am reminded of the idea that public service is one of the best ways to change the world and make an impact. . . . It represents the leadership concepts of being willing to work with others around you for the good of all.”

Autophotography data included statements from participants like Parker, who shared, “It represents the leadership concepts of being willing to work with others around you for the good of all.” Other participants, like Jessie, captioned photos with, “this photo represents the leadership concept of growth which I learned a lot about on this trip.” Logan said their photo “represents the competencies I’ve developed through this [trip] because I want to be that open leader who brings people in to teach them about what I am so passionate about.” Other responses highlighted topics such as personal growth being centric to successful leadership, teaching others, and being aware of their impacts. When later asked about leadership development in post-trip focus groups, participants again referred to awareness of foundational leadership concepts as perceived gain.

An emergent sub-theme resulting from the short-term domestic study tour is the expansion of positional skills as State FFA Officers (Figure 4). As result of experiencing this trip alongside fellow state FFA officers, participants felt reenergized in their roles. ILSSO provided a rare opportunity to relate with others in their specific positions, share experiences, relay beneficial knowledge, and learn beneficial skills for their tenure as state FFA officers.

## Figure 5

### *Positional Skill Development: Industry Knowledge Gain*



*Note.* Photo caption: “I believe I grew as a leader because I gained the knowledge necessary to carry on a conversation with a FFA member if needed. I also made connections with FFA State Officers from across

the country and benefited greatly from learning about their areas of agriculture and their personal experiences within the FFA.”

Some of the gained skills mentioned in the photo captions include functions necessary to the unique roles of state FFA office. Cindy shared, “I grew as a leader because I gained the knowledge necessary to carry on a conversation with a FFA member if needed.” Jarek captioned: “The small group members and leader gave me better understanding of facilitation methods.” Even foundational concepts pertinent to participant’s role as a state officer were mentioned in captions. Kennedy captioned their photo, “I saw a great representation of what FFA means.” Other concepts mentioned in the data included an expanded passion for topics such as teaching and the agriculture industry. While positional skill development represents a small portion of data collection, it was shared as most useful to participants immediately following the short-term domestic study tour.

#### Theme #4: Expansion of Social Capital

The largest takeaway for the majority of participants was *expanded* relationships (i.e., social capital) (Figure 6). Participant photo-captions alluded to deep personal and professional relationships developed with other ILSSO participants. These opportunities to expand social capital developed the participants’ confidence in branching out to new people. While submitting autophotography responses, Reece wrote:

In this photo [there are] a bunch of state officers who have grown to love our individuality. No matter how different we are and where we come from, we [have] grown together by learning to appreciate the diversity in one another as well as the agriculture we are learning about. That love for connection through learning together is captured in this photo.

#### Figure 6

*Social Capital: Participants Posing at Avocado Farm (left), Participants at Beach (right).*



*Note.* Photo (left) caption: “In this photo. . . is a bunch of state officers who have grown to love our individuality. . . we have grown together by learning to appreciate the diversity in one another as well as the agriculture we are learning about.” Photo (right) caption: “This photo represents the endless support for one another as leaders.”

Participants also shared *gained* (i.e., new) relationships being the largest take away from the short-term domestic study tour. Logan captioned, “I will carry these people in my heart further than any knowledge I could’ve gained these 10 days.” Some participants shared how the gained relationships led them to better understandings of the agricultural industry. Participants like Robbie shared, “I’ve developed connections throughout this experience and strengthened friendships. Being able to meet others has grown my perspectives on many issues within the agriculture industry nationwide.” Additionally, many participants believed these gained relationships will be of use in future careers in the agricultural industry.

Killian shared they were able to “form a lifelong friendship and working relationship that will no doubt bring benefits to fruition in the agricultural industry.”

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The purpose of this study was to explore how state FFA officers used autophotography to express the perceived leadership competencies developed through a short-term domestic study tour experience. Four themes were revealed through photo-caption data. Autophotography proved to be a useful tool in capturing insight into experiences representative of participants (Nolan, 2006).

Just as Hanvey (1982)'s concept of global perspective suggests formal and informal study abroad experiences can lead young people to compare and analyze their lived experiences and cultural norms with new ideas and practices, we found ILSSO participants' perceptions about agriculture were challenged. Participant photo-captions described an expansion of their agriculture knowledge due to this short-term domestic study tour; however, when triangulated with other data, most of the perceived knowledge gain was actually an increase in agriculture industry exposure and expansion of previously held foundational agricultural concepts. While knowledge gain cannot be concluded through this study due to quantitative instruments not being utilized, participants were still provided and reported a dynamic learning experience. Participants seemed to show a strong appreciation for the various agricultural practices they encountered and expressed a desire to advocate for the agricultural industry as a result of this experience. In addition, participants shared changing perceptions of the agriculture industry due to exposure to new sectors and practices.

Findings revealed limited specific leadership competency development. Rather, participants refer to gained knowledge and experiential awareness to leadership competency development. Participants reference their ability to advocate better for the agricultural industry as a leadership competency. Additionally, participants identified some behaviors they believed were important for one's leadership ability such as being open-minded and an expansion of participant comfort zones. Data showed participants may not have viewed ILSSO as a leadership development experience, rather a social and educational opportunity (Humphrey et al., 2023). While these experiential learning opportunities exist in the agriculture space to expand knowledge, they may not have an impactful effect on the development of participants' leadership ability (Humphrey et al., 2023; Radford, 2020).

A shared travel experience poses a great vessel for relationship building and personal growth in any context, including a short-term domestic study tour (Matteucci et al., 2019). Similar to many professional development programs, participants shared knowledge with their peers, as well as experiential camaraderie, resulting in peer coaching and development (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Through this shared travel experience, we saw the development of a community of practice among participants in their roles as state FFA officers and as stakeholders of the agricultural industry. They anticipated these new relationships leading to future professional relationships and potential professional development in the agriculture industry. It is important to note that some of the positional skill development found in this study may be unique to the ILSSO short-term domestic study tour experience and its participants due to their professional roles as state FFA officers.

Participants shared value in personal social capital gain. Social capital is only truly realized when participants are aware of it (Dewey et al., 2011; Smith & Giraud-Carrier, 2010). In this study, through the eyes of participants, researchers recognized implicit affinities and explicit connections (Dewey et al., 2011; Smith & Giraud-Carrier, 2010). Participants contributed their roles as state FFA officers, stake in agriculture, and shared travel experience as factors in their personal development and expansion of social capital. Many participants reported expansion of social capital as the most impactful outcome of their experience. This supports parallel findings from Roberts et al. (2020) regarding short-term study abroad

programs and social-oriented students, who found primary motivation for participation in these programs were social dimensions such as networking and relationship-building.

### Recommendations

Understanding participants perceived leadership competency development through this short-term domestic study tour has helped create a series of recommendations for future short-term study experiences. It is recommended for those attempting to replicate a similar short-term travel experience for student leaders, whether domestic or abroad, to develop a theoretical leadership framework and curriculum. The development of such framework would better guide participant learning experience and leadership development. Curriculum should indicate specific goals for participants and reconsider the use of leadership centric branding if current outcomes or future goals of the experience are to develop social capital and promote agriculture industry exposure. Frontloading leadership competency development goals to participants may assist in reaching specific objectives in leadership development and cultural competency development. One example of this may include guided discussion prior to each experience that sets individual participant objectives. Current practices of independent reflection and guided discussion post experience in these programs may not be enough to guide participants into an explicit state of personal leadership development. It is also recommended that the curriculum introduce participants to methods of recognizing experiential gain through personal reflection and help participants implement practices of post-trip utilization. Significant financial, physical, and psychological inputs are required of participants in these types of experiences. At the end, participants should be able to produce a deliverable output, such as being able to personally report perceived gain and direct application from their experience to stakeholders.

While this study did not include a pre- and/or post-trip instrument to measure leadership development, cultural competence, or agriculture industry knowledge during the domestic study tour, we recommend future studies explore quantitative testing of these variables. This study should also be replicated in a global context to understand if the leadership competency development of students differs in an experience abroad. Understanding the differences between domestic and abroad travel may be beneficial in weighing advantages and disadvantages to these travel experiences such as cost, perceived safety, and accessibility. To address the contextual limitation posed by photo-caption data, future studies should implement post-trip interviews to capture larger participant perceptions of their autophotography. Often utilized in autophotography studies, post-experience interviews help researchers capture important context and a deeper meaning behind participant submissions.

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