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DO AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS PRODUCE COMMUNITY LEADERS? A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF AN AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM ON PARTICIPANTS' COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract

Agricultural leadership program efficacy has been determined by a number of studies; however, most have not reported on the impacts that participants have had on actual community leadership. The study determined the extent to which participants in a two-year agricultural leadership program became community leaders and contributed to rural community development processes (RCD). Participants in the study were graduates of the program from 1982 to 2001 (N=290). Surveys administered to the population and face-to-face interviews with eight purposefully selected subjects were used to collect data. In spite of the survey findings of self-reported changes in knowledge and behavior, qualitative findings revealed that participants were aware of the importance of RCD, but they were not serving in leadership positions and were taking a minimal role to improve their communities. Recommendations include incorporating a practicum into the program that teaches needs assessment, project development, and change agent skills so that participants have the knowledge and skills to serve as effective community leaders.

Introduction

Agricultural leadership programs have a 70-year history in the United States. There is a need for leadership programs that teach citizens how to cope with the barrage of change in the rural environment. In particular, citizens must be educated and prepared with essential knowledge and skills abilities in order to assume leadership positions that concentrate on the concerns of rural America.

The current array of agricultural leadership programs demonstrates a significant societal investment towards the important goal of fostering community participation by rural citizens (Rossing & Heasley, 1987). Rural community development (RCD) is especially critical in the Southwest as the region faces problems symptomatic of a declining economy and a lack of leadership capacity to solve them. Effective RCD is dependent on local leaders' knowledge, skills, and willingness to assume key roles in the development process (Mulkey, 1989).

Realizing the need to train more leaders to improve the quality of life for rural citizens, a major land-grant university in the Southwest founded an agricultural leadership program in 1982. The goal of the program was to teach adults (ages 25-45) involved in agriculture or agribusiness leadership skills to impact policy at local, state, and national levels. Ten classes of approximately 30 participants each had been completed at the time of the study. The program objectives included 1) increasing participants' awareness of the agricultural industry, 2) expanding participants' understanding of U.S. economic, political, cultural, and social systems, 3) increasing participants' ability to analyze and react to complex problems affecting rural communities, 4) increasing participants' leadership involvement and activities at the

local, state, or national level, and 5) helping participants increase and use their skills to solve community problems.

The program for the most recent class, held between August 2000 and March 2001, consisted of 13 seminars, a seven-day trip to Washington, D.C., and a two-week trip to New Zealand in March 2001. The weekend seminars (Friday afternoon to Sunday evening) focused on personal development issues, tours of agricultural research facilities, tours of specialty agricultural enterprises, tours of the state capital and discussions with state leaders, visits with agricultural association leaders and media personalities, visits to farm shows, and the future of rural America, including economic and demographic trends in the state.

Theoretical Framework

Team leadership (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1993; Northouse, 2001) is thought to be one of the most effective in community settings and provided the theoretical underpinning for this study. Team leadership relies on a leader's networks and ability to utilize them for collective community action. Teams are comprised of individuals with high levels of interaction who must rely on each other for success (Pomrenke, 1982). Team leadership comes about through the development of individual leadership skills necessary to facilitate group process. The leadership role may shift to whoever has the necessary skills to solve the problem at hand.

As team members practice self-management, they begin to take personal responsibility for outcomes, feel personally accountable, monitor and manage their own performance, and help others to improve performance (Hackman, 1987). The process of team leadership places more ownership and responsibility on all team members than other types of leadership (Horner, 1997).

Successful leaders take on internal relational leadership functions such as facilitation, coaching, and managing relations outside the group because the leaders are firmly integrated within the team. Team leaders are required to use innovation and personal values to guide their actions (Horner, 1997). Ideal teams provide an arena where new skills and behaviors can be tested and foster a climate that reduces threatening situations (Pomrenke, 1982).

In some situations, the leadership may be rotated among team members. The line between leaders and followers becomes more flexible. All members of a team have the potential to provide leadership to the team. Developing shared knowledge among team members, promoting open communication, providing goals, and allocating resources efficiently are among the internal tasks for team leaders. Networking, accessing, and sharing information are external functions to the organization, but are necessary to smooth functioning of a team environment (Hughes Ginnett, & Curphy, 1993).

Purpose

Given the importance of effective leadership to rural community development processes, the study asked the question: Did the agricultural leadership program actually produce community leaders? The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: Did the agricultural leadership program contribute to developing leaders for rural community development?
RQ2: Did participants take an active role in improving their communities after completing the program?

Methods

The population for the survey was all graduates of the program from 1982 to 2001 (N=290). A census was used for the survey based on the database kept by the director. Three individuals were excluded from the study due to death (n=1) and wrong addresses (n=2).

Three data collection techniques were used for the research: 1) a then-post survey, 2) open-ended questions on the survey, and 3) face-to-face interviews with eight participants. Of the 125 participants who returned the survey (43% response rate), eight supplied extreme cases regarding the positive impact that the program had made on them in regard to integrating RCD processes into the program. Based on the survey responses, the individuals exemplified model change agents within

their communities. Therefore, the sample for the face-to-face interviews was purposefully selected from subjects who completed the survey using a process known as *extreme case sampling*. Extreme case sampling involves people with unusual characteristics. In this case, the eight individuals were chosen based on their above average self-reported understanding of and commitment to RCD.

An original survey was developed for the study; however, it was based on Pigg's (2001) work. The questions from the survey are listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The instrument was a then-post design with Likert-type scales. Respondents were asked to read each question, reflect on their knowledge or behavior before entering the program (then), and rate themselves accordingly using a Likert-type scale. A second column adjacent to the first contained an exact copy of the scale and asked the respondent to reflect on their knowledge or behavior after completing the program (post) and rate themselves a second time. The ratings included Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree and were scored 1-4 respectively. Not sure/not applicable was coded 0 for the analysis. The two scores were compared using a *t*-test to determine differences in perception from before and after the program at a single point in time. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for all survey questions was calculated at .96.

The then-post design was chosen to control for several threats to validity and reliability, including *overestimation of changes in knowledge* and *response-shift bias* among participants. When pretest-posttest information is collected, actual changes in knowledge and behaviors may be altered if the participants overestimate their knowledge and skills on the pretest. Similarly, pretest overestimation is likely if participants lack a clear understanding of the attitude, behavior, or skill the program is attempting to affect (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katsev, 2000).

Changes in participants' frame of reference due to the program is called *response-shift bias* (Pratt et al., 2000; Rohs, 1999). To avoid this source of error for self-report surveys, a then-post method was used to collect retrospective data at the conclusion of the program as participants rated themselves within a single frame of reference and at a single point in time.

Although the then-post test controls for response-shift bias and overestimation, other threats to validity and reliability arise such as *memory-related problems, social desirability responding,* and *effort justification* (Howard, Millham, Slaten, & O'Donnell, 1981; Pratt et al., 2000; Sprangers, 1987). Evaluators using retrospective tests must consider memory-related problems that influence the recall process. Clarifying a defined period, such as "since you began this program," may facilitate recall (Pratt et al.). When using retrospective tests, instead of representing the accurate treatment, they represent impression management as a possibility (Sprangers, 1987). *Effort justification* occurs when subjects do not experience any benefit of the training, and in an attempt to justify the effort spent, adjust their initial pre-treatment ratings in a downward direction or their post-treatment in an upward direction (Sprangers, 1987). Control for *memory-related problems, social desirability,* and *effort justification* was attempted by using objective measures (Pratt et al.; Sprangers, 1987). Interviews were also used to probe participants on exact behavior changes to triangulate results.

A panel of experts consisting of four faculty members with expertise in leadership education or RCD processes confirmed content, construct, and face validity of the survey. A pilot test was conducted with 30 randomly selected participants from the population. Seventeen people returned the pilot survey. The pilot surveys were qualitatively analyzed and minor revisions were made. Because only minor revisions were required, the pilot data (n=17) were pooled with the final survey data (n=108) for a final response rate of 43% (n=125). The Dillman (2000) four-phase mailing approach was used for both the pilot survey and the final survey.

The double-dipping method was used to determine differences between the respondents and non-respondents (Linder, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). Along with an early to late respondent comparison, a random sample of 10% (n=20) of the non-respondents were administered portions of

the survey via telephone. The two groups were compared on gender, employment status, level of educational attainment, and marital status with a Pearson chi-square. There were significant differences between non-respondents and respondents in gender, employment status, and marital status. There were no significant differences between the early to late respondents on any variable. Thus, results of the study can only be generalized to the survey respondents.

Survey data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 8.0. An alpha level of .05 was set a priori to determine statistically significant differences among variables. The statistical tests used were descriptive, *t*-tests, and Cohen's *d* effect size. Likert-type data are ordinal in nature; thus, it is acceptable and practical to treat it as interval data and subject it to statistical analysis as long as care is taken in the interpretation of the results (Kerlinger, 1986). Inferential statistics were used as a guide to understanding the relationships between variables. The effect size measures the magnitude of the treatment effect (Cohen, 1988). Measures of strength of association and effect size specify the practical significance of the research.

Eight people were selected to be interviewed based on their survey responses for extreme cases, which demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of RCD. The participants were telephoned and asked to participate in an interview. One researcher drove to their place of business and conducted the interviews in their respective offices. The interviews followed a semi-structured outline; however, probing questions allowed the researcher to explore emerging themes (Merriam, 1998).

To establish validity for the interviews, each interview was recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were sent to the interviewees to validate their statements (Merriam, 1998). The qualitative analysis software program ATLAS.ti® was used to organize the data from the open-ended survey questions and the interviews. Both data sets were analyzed and reported following Creswell's (1998) procedures:

1. *Organization of data.* The interviews were recorded and transcribed, cleaned by a research assistant who listened to the interview and read the transcript to check for accuracy. The text was then loaded into the qualitative data program ATLAS.ti®.
2. *Categorization of data.* The data were clustered into meaningful groups (coded) using ATLAS.ti® as an organizational tool.
3. *Interpretation of the data.* Statements that fell into like codes were examined for specific meanings in relationship to the purpose of the study.
4. *Identification of patterns.* The data and their interpretations were examined for themes and patterns that characterized the program and allowed the researchers to draw conclusions.
5. *Synthesis.* An overall representation of participants' responses was created where conclusions and recommendations were drawn based on the data presented.

Findings and Conclusions

Respondents' Profile

Survey respondents were married (90%), well educated, middle class working adults who were civically engaged. One-hundred and thirteen men (90%) and 12 women (10%) responded to the survey. Their mean age was 43 years. The majority (54%) graduated college and 32% had earned graduate credit. Forty-seven percent earned $30,000 - $50,000 annually and 100% voted in the last presidential election. Sixty percent volunteered 5-10 hours per month in social service activities and 69% were involved in 5-10 hours of economic development activities per month. They lived in their communities for an average of 24 years and the average community size was 30,000 people.

Research Question 1: Did the Program Contribute to Developing Leaders for Rural Community Development?

Before community leaders can implement desired change, they must have a feel for existing attitudes and perceptions with respect to those factors that impact

economic development objectives and outcomes (Williams, 1989). Effective community leaders could also promote community development by determining what leadership styles are needed for change based on their own, and their followers' skills and education (Robinson, 1994). Community leaders should be able to identify problems, assess community organizational structures, develop the necessary capacity, and design a plan for action to address problems (Mulkey, 1989).

The survey findings for RQ1 indicated that respondents believed the program developed them as leaders to meet their community's needs. A paired samples *t*-test resulted in significant differences for each variable from the then-post survey (Table 1). The effect size, Cohen's *d,* was 1.79, indicating a large effect size for this construct (Cohen, 1988).

Table 1
Paired Sample (Then-Post) t-test for Research Question One

Survey Question	*n*	*M* Then	*M* Post
I help people understand each other so they can reach a common ground.	125	2.71	2.01*
I have knowledge of city infrastructure and support systems.	125	2.94	2.02*
I have knowledge of county infrastructure and support systems.	125	2.81	1.89*
I have knowledge of state infrastructure and support systems.	124	2.91	1.76*
I know how to access city infrastructure and support systems.	123	2.84	2.05*
I know how to access county infrastructure and support systems.	125	2.84	1.90*
I know how to access state infrastructure and support systems.	125	2.93	1.73*
I actively use city resources to meet the needs in my community.	124	3.35	2.52*
I actively use county resources to meet the needs in my community.	124	3.14	2.45*
I actively use state resources to meet the needs in my community.	124	3.09	2.17*
I am aware of the needs of my community.	124	2.89	1.79*
I use leadership skills in different settings.	124	2.47	1.36*
I can identify local leaders in my community.	122	2.30	1.46*
I understand my own weaknesses.	123	2.74	1.59*
I understand my own strengths.	124	2.53	1.53*
I respect a variety of leadership styles.	124	2.65	1.48*
I utilize different leadership styles in different situations.	124	2.85	1.82*
I allow others to take a leadership role when appropriate.	124	2.40	1.48*
I can be a follower.	124	2.18	1.77*
I can become a leader in situations.	124	2.27	1.29*
I assist organizations to think and act in different ways.	124	2.69	1.76*
I can effectively lead volunteer organizations.	124	2.52	1.60*
I have a good understanding of public issues in my community.	124	2.67	1.77*
I am well qualified to participate in public issues.	124	2.68	1.69*
I have enough knowledge to do a good job in pubic office.	123	2.72	1.72*
I have the skills to do a good job in public office.	124	2.69	1.72*
I have the desire to run for a public office.	123	3.02	2.50*

Scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree, 5=Not Applicable.
*Significantly different.

Interview Findings

Findings from the eight purposefully selected interviewees were synthesized and conclusions are presented to triangulate the survey findings with additional data sources. Interviewees are represented by numbers presented in brackets to protect their identity.

Successful community development efforts are largely dependent on locally generated knowledge of how the community works. The development process includes needs assessment, community analyses, consensus building, and goal setting. Where these activities exist, communities are more likely to be actively engaged in the process of discovering and understanding their needs (Mulkey, 1989).

All eight interviewees were asked directly if they could identify their communities' needs [1, 29, 90, 134, 168, 208, 272, 290]. Three participants stated that the program showed them who they needed to contact so those needs could be identified [1, 168, 290]. These participants believed that the program focused on how to find information, not how to use the information to implement change. "The one thing I learned in [program] is I don't have to have those skills (RCD), I just need to know where to go to get them" [168]. "The groundwork was laid so we did learn whom we needed to talk to so we can find out those needs" [290].

One of the most important components of community leadership is the ability to generate collective action at the community level (Heekathorn, 1993). A central concept in the RCD literature emphasizes the importance of local participation as a means of strengthening the community (Martin & Wilkinson, 1985). One participant believed the program taught him to seek political power at the national level rather than work for development at the local level. "It probably helped me a lot more at the state and national level than on a community level. Basically, a lot of the things have a reflection on me and what's going to pay off on me is not as much at the local level as a state or regional level. The program identified more in what to do in the political process, more of how to sequester groups to help you with some of your problems and how to look at some groups that have similar causes to try to get those groups together because more numbers mean more votes for elections and people get their way" [90]. Participant 90's belief that the program helped more at the state and national level is inconsistent with the literature concerning effective RCD.

Three participants [29, 168, 272] believed they had a good understanding of their communities' needs before entering the program. These participants did not believe the program changed their knowledge of community needs. One interviewee did not think the program gave him the skills to identify needs in his community [134].

The participants were asked what the program could do to teach them to learn how to identify their community's needs. Two participants believed that the seminars should be changed to develop skills rather than focus on awareness [134, 208]. "Bring the whole aspect of community development into the program. Change the focus of the program to teach participants how to identify what the needs of their communities are; talk more about the different aspects of local government and organizations" [208].

Before community leaders can implement change, they must have a feel for existing attitudes and perceptions with respect to those factors which impact development (Williams, 1989). After reviewing the literature, it was concluded that if the program were developing leaders to meet community needs, then participants would know how to identify those needs as well as design and implement action plans for community development. This was not the case among the eight interviewees. Therefore, the program did not contribute to developing leaders for rural community development as participants were not equipped with the knowledge or skills to identify their community's needs. The program did, however, increase awareness that communities have needs.

Research Question 2: Did the Participants Take an Active Role in Improving Their Communities After Completing the Program?

The importance of participation as a means of strengthening local communities cannot be overstated as community leaders provide the basis for improving the quality

of life in rural America (Martin & Wilkinson, 1985). People must not only get involved, they must also recruit people from racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds who represent the community (Beaulieu & Smith, 2000).

The survey findings indicated that respondents believed they were taking an active role to improve their communities. A paired samples *t*-test resulted in significant differences for all but one variable from the survey (Table 2). The effect size, Cohen's *d,* was .67, indicating a large effect size for this construct (Cohen, 1988). The insignificant variable was, "I am very active in making efforts to improve the well being of the disadvantaged in my community" ($p = .15$).

Table 2
Paired Sample (Then-Post) t-test for Research Question Two

Survey Question	*n*	*M* Then	*M* Post
I actively strive to improve the quality of life in my community.	124	2.67	1.95*
I am very active in recruiting new industries for my community.	124	3.03	2.52*
I am very active in making efforts to improve and expand local education.	124	2.90	2.05*
I am very active in seeking out special development programs in agriculture or industry.	124	2.89	2.02*
I am very active in making efforts to improve the well being of the disadvantaged in my community.	124	2.98	2.73
I am very involved in projects concerned with community water resources.	124	2.80	2.46*
I work in retaining current business and industry.	124	2.73	2.27*

Scale: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree, 5=Not Applicable.
*Significantly different.

The survey findings also indicated that respondents believed they were listening to people with different socioeconomic status within their communities. A paired samples *t*-test resulted in significant differences for all variables from the then-post survey (Table 3). The effect size, Cohen's *d,* was .49, indicating a medium effect size for this construct (Cohen, 1988).

Table 3
Paired Sample (Then/Post) t-test for Research Question Two

Survey Question	*n*	Mean Then	Mean Post
I take a very active role in improving my community.	124	2.76	2.00*
I actively listen to the needs of lower economic status individuals in my community.	124	2.70	2.23*
I actively voice the concerns of individuals of lower economic status in my community.	124	2.77	2.44*
I regard the needs of all citizens in my community regardless of economic status.	124	2.35	1.92*
I actively reach out to individuals of lower economic status than me to increase their participation in political or policy issues.	124	2.84	2.47*
I actively work to close the participation gap between citizens of higher and lower economic status in my community.	124	2.91	2.49*
I help to expand local participation in policy issues.	124	2.86	2.31*

Scale: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree, 5=Not Applicable.
*Significantly Different.

Interview Findings

All interviewees were asked specifically what they had done to improve their community since completing the program [1, 29, 90, 134, 168, 208, 272, 290]. Five interviewees reported they had not been active in their community as leaders [29, 90, 208, 208, 290]. "I probably have not done as much as I potentially could in developing this community" [90]. "I am not taking on as much as I probably should have" [29]. "I am not very active as far as a community leader in community organizations. I hope that I have become more active in my community in more of a support role. I don't feel like I came home and became a driving force to develop local communities [after the program]" [290]. One interviewee believed he was more involved in leadership roles before the program than after [208]. He believed his opinions were drastically different from other people and that the only leadership role he could assume was to lead by example and change his agricultural operation to be more sustainable [208].

Involvement at the local level was problematic for one participant [90]. He did not believe that graduates from the program could effectively be involved in community organizations because the graduates are more developed and better-quality leaders than ones in local community organizations who have not participated in the program. "Getting involved in the local organizations is probably a loser. The people who graduate from the program are so far ahead and the local agenda is so slow…. The people who graduate from [the program] are motivated by what helps them and their families" [90]. Another interviewee [168] believed the program stressed involvement at the state level instead of the community level.

Two participants have taken on leadership roles in regional organizations [1, 134], and one participant [168] has started working on developing local projects to benefit the community. "I have taken on new leadership roles in regional organizations, I wouldn't have [done this] had I not gone through the program, but I could make more of an impact on rural development if I had more skills in managing change, strategic planning, and needs assessment" [134].

Networking opportunities were the most important aspects of the program for all the interviewees [1, 29, 90, 134, 168, 208, 272, 290]. The exposure to different people and organizations put participants in contact with people who could assist them in RCD efforts. However, they did not believe they were currently using their networks to the fullest extent possible at the time of the

interview [1, 29, 90, 134, 168, 208, 272, 290].

Qualitative data from the open-ended questions on the survey were used to triangulate findings. Sixty-four respondents (51%) answered the question on the survey: "What was most beneficial to your community development efforts?" Eighteen of the sixty-four respondents (28%) believed that networking was the most beneficial thing they learned in the program. The networks offered exposure to other people and were valuable for direction and support [15, 179].

Based on the interview responses, most participants were not making changes in their communities, nor had they used their networks for community improvement. Participants reported that information gained in the program was not effectively used because they did not have the necessary skills to promote change.

The RCD process includes problem and needs identification, assessment of community organizational structures, developing capacity, and implementing programs to address issues (Mulkey, 1989). Community leaders should have adequate knowledge and skills to carry out these functions. One of the most important components of community leaders is the ability to mobilize resources at the community level (Heekathorn, 1993). The RCD literature emphasizes the importance of local participation as a means of strengthening the local community (Martin & Wilkinson, 1985). When asked directly about involvement in RCD activities, participants reported not being active in any phase of community development. Therefore, it was concluded that participants have not taken an active role in improving their communities after completing the program.

Recommendations, Discussion, and Implications

The findings support the idea that the survey respondents *overestimated* their knowledge and skills regarding RCD processes on the survey (Pratt et al., 2000) due to *social desirability* (Howard, et al., 1981) and *effort justification* (Sprangers, 1987). Therefore, the discussion and implications are based primarily on the qualitative data.

The agricultural leadership program provided adequate networking opportunities and time for participants to access information for their communities. Networking, accessing, and sharing information are team leadership functions essential to organizations (Hughes et al., 1993). To expand on this concept, the program required participants to form teams within the class to identify major problems facing agriculture. Thus, the program provided a climate for team work but failed to fully integrate the team leadership model and practice beyond the confines of the program. Therefore, it is recommended that the program director expand this assignment to include more team leadership theory into action by inviting community members to participant in authentic team leadership exercises. This process would also serve to hold participants more accountable by making the program more transparent to communities.

The agricultural leadership program did create awareness among participants regarding the importance of RCD as stated in their objectives; however, it failed to move participants into action by producing community leaders. The qualitative data suggested that awareness was inadequate for participants to lead community development efforts as participants lacked both knowledge and skills for effecting change. Program designers should move beyond providing an awareness only program and provide opportunities to increase participants' skills of RCD processes by integrating more seminars and workshops into the program that focus on the mechanics of RCD. These experiences should also focus on new development opportunities participants can initiate through community examination and discussion with successful community leaders.

Townsend (2002) reported that one-shot programs develop awareness, but were not effective in changing behavior. When an extended and sustained leadership class was provided, attitudes and leadership behaviors changed after the class. The program provides the long-term contact needed to change leadership behaviors; thus, the

potential for incorporating knowledge and skill development exists, but is currently underutilized. Program designers should integrate a leadership project or practicum into the program. Asking participants to create and implement a plan for community development within their home towns would serve to develop leadership skills, needs assessment skills, change agent skills, and increase participant impact on community development, at least in the short term. By experiencing success in a community development project, participants may also become more motivated to repeat the experience and become truly effective leaders rather than bystanders in their communities.

Mulkey (1989) recommends that leaders have adequate knowledge of community development and what processes community developers use. Heekathorn (1993) found that one of the most important components of community leaders was their ability to mobilize resources at the community level. The findings and conclusions of the study raise questions regarding the objectives and the current direction of the program. The findings showed that the program currently operates as an awareness program for agricultural issues. The stakeholders (program designer, college dean, state legislators, donors, and participants, to name a few) need to reconsider whether the program should continue as an awareness program when so much potential exists for developing community leaders who can mobilize resources to bring positive development to their communities. Can stakeholders afford to continue the program in the current context of awareness when rural America is in demise? The cost of the program (over $250,000 per class) justifies changing the goals to developing effective leaders who can work as community developers.

The program is glamorous as participants travel in another country for two weeks to study agricultural issues, meet with state legislators, and travel to Washington, D.C. to meet national leaders. Taking part in the program brings prestige and higher status to participants. Building communities is not glamorous work, but rather difficult as people construct barriers to prevent discussion and action promoting changes (Hughs, 1998). If the program is sincere about improving the quality of life in rural communities as stated in its brochures, then the program should move past awareness and develop leaders who can and will influence the direction of development in their communities.

This study should also alert researchers to the fact that existing survey methods for determining program impacts may be inadequate. Participants could not authenticate actual changes in behavior made after participating in the program. Survey-based studies may be actually documenting participants need for *effort justification* rather than actual program impacts. Other methods to determine participant impact on community development should be used to triangulate survey findings.

Recommendations for further research include conducting a longitudinal study of the program to document changes in the program based on the initial findings. Also, the program designer should incorporate a participant-centered documentation process of the participants' impact on community development for internal evaluation purposes.

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