



## **Academic Leadership Programs in the United States**

**Kathy L. Guthrie  
Trisha S. Teig  
Pei Hu**

# Academic Leadership Programs in the United States

Kathy L. Guthrie

Trisha S. Teig

Pei Hu

May 1, 2018



An exploratory research project of the Leadership Learning Research Center, a joint venture of the College of Education and the Center for Leadership & Social Change at Florida State University.

Please cite as: Guthrie, K. L., Teig, T. S., & Hu, P. (2018). *Academic leadership programs in the United States*. Tallahassee, FL: Leadership Learning Research Center, Florida State University.

Increasing numbers and diversity of leadership development programs in colleges and universities represent a success story for the importance of leadership education in higher education (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Komives et al., 2011). Leadership educators and scholars believe leadership is a learned process, incorporating the possibility for all students to develop skills and competencies for future leadership endeavors (Astin et al., 2000; Brungardt, Moore, Gould, & Potts, 1998). While the popularity of instituting academic leadership programs has been noted since the early years of leadership education's rise in higher education (Komives et al., 2011; Owen, 2008), demographic data about leadership programs remains fairly inaccessible. The purpose of this report is to share preliminary analysis conducted by the Leadership Learning Research Center of data from the International Leadership Association's (ILA) Leadership Program Directory (ILA, 2016) and data captured from institutional websites detailing program type, courses, and descriptions. This information provides demographic descriptive data of leadership-related programs in the United States.

## History of Leadership Program Demographics

A proliferation of leadership development programs grew out of the 1980's and have increased consistently since (Komives et al., 2011; Mandicott & Bowling, 2002). This expansion supports the belief that leadership can be taught, and therefore, leadership training, development, and education programs should be readily available for new students of leadership (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Reisburg, 1998; Roberts, 1981).

Leadership scholars and student personnel professionals noted in the late 1970's and early 1980's an anticipated growth in the quantity of leadership programs across the United States (Komives, 2011; Roberts, 1981; Watkins, in process).

The 1976 formulation of a Leadership Taskforce by the American College Student Personnel Association (ACPA) Commission IV instituted a concentrated focus on understanding leadership programs on college campuses (Watkins, in process). "The Taskforce conducted surveys, gathered resources, and conducted research over a three-year time span that eventually informed the ACPA monograph, *Student Leadership Programs in Higher Education* (Roberts, 1981)" (Watkins, in process). Owen elaborates, "By 1986, the Leadership Task Force had identified 182 college leadership programs in 41 states" (ACPA, 1986 as cited in Owen, 2008, p. 1-2). Brungardt (1997) highlighted research citing between 500-600 leadership programs existing by 1987. By 1998, the Center for Creative Leadership reported over 700 leadership programs within the United States (Reisburg, 1998). Owen (2008) also distinguished the upward trend; she cited over 800 programs known to researchers as of 2001. Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, and Arensdorf (2006) identified "nearly 1,000" programs in existence their introduction to a qualitative analysis of undergraduate leadership programs (p. 5). Within *The Handbook for Student Leadership Development* Komives (2011) delivered a foundational history of leadership development programs from both curricular and co-curricular perspectives. She pinpointed over 1,000 colleges and universities with established curricular leadership programs (Komives, 2011). Furthermore, since the beginning of this expansion to present day, leadership scholars have initiated studies with statements about the growth of leadership development programs as evidence for the need for extended scholarship in the field (e.g. Chambers, 1994; Guthrie & Jenkins; Mandicott & Bowling, 2002; Owen & Komives, 2007).

The previous research represents the breadth of what is known about demographic data of leadership programs in the United States. Often built off of statements from previous researchers, this scholarship is at times unclear about where the

numbers and data originated. Additionally, scholars have focused mainly on the numbers, estimating how many programs are available at a certain period. While the steady growth in the amount of leadership programs in higher education is apparent, the scope, including accurate numbers and types of programs is not explicit. Because of this lack of clear data, researchers have concentrated on leadership program types in a small scale, for example, focusing on agricultural leadership development (Brown & Fritz, 1994) or developmental leadership programs (Ayman, Adams, Fisher, & Hartman, 2003; Reinelt & Russon, 2003) to examine in depth a specific category of program. However, a large-scale investigation of leadership programs has not been accomplished and represents a significant gap in the literature. As Gigliotti (2015) recently stated, the current state of leadership programs continues to show upward trends for the future. This continued growth necessitates leadership educators and scholars to understand the outlook of leadership-identified academic programs within the United States. This information is crucial for current perspective on the scope and nature of programs and also sets precedent for continued tracking of this data for the future growth of the field. Researchers need a clear picture of how many and what kind of leadership programs exist to fully understand the state of academic leadership programs in higher education today.

## International Leadership Association (ILA) Leadership Program Directory

The International Leadership Association (ILA) encourages institutions to self-identify academic leadership programs to be listed in their Leadership Program Directory. In 2008, a grant from the C. Charles Jackson Foundation funded initial efforts to collect data and outreach to programs to begin the directory. Members of ILA and targeted

programs known to the ILA staff were invited to submit their program's information to the directory. Additionally, the ILA disseminated information about participation in the directory through their publication, *Member Connector*. Active recruitment for the directory ceased following this first effort (D. DeRuyver, personal communication, November 19, 2017). However, the Leadership Program Directory continues to be an active document, as any academic programs may be added to the directory when a program staff fills out the program directory form on the ILA website. This information is then listed in a publicly accessible, searchable database (ILA, 2016).

## Methods

This study implemented a descriptive analysis of the data contained in the ILA Leadership Program Directory database and additional data collected through Leadership Learning Research Center (LLRC) research of program websites. The International Leadership Association provided access to the full content of the database to the LLRC staff at Florida State University for the purpose of this project. The ILA Leadership Program Directory contains a wealth of information about leadership programs in the United States and internationally. The data from this study represents academic, for-credit curricular programs in the United States who self-selected to list their organizations in the ILA directory and data captured from research completed by the LLRC from academic program websites, including information about program mission and vision, course sequencing, program history, and program contact information. The current directory hosts 1,558 academic programs included from United States institutions of higher education (ILA, 2016).

The data was analyzed to answer the following questions:

1. How many curricular leadership programs exist in the United States?
2. What types of degrees and how many degrees are offered by leadership programs in the United States?
3. Where are leadership programs located in institutions of higher education in the United States? By State? By Region?
4. What types of institutions house leadership programs? Public/Private/Religious Affiliated? Carnegie Classification?

5. What types of classes are offered by leadership programs in the United States?

The study underwent two phases of data collection and review to apply descriptive analysis to understand leadership programs in the United States.

### Phase 1 – ILA Directory Data Review and Analysis

The initial phase of the study implemented clean-up methods to the data shared by the International Leadership Association. The information captured by

Figure 1. Academic Leadership Programs in the US by Degree



programs self-selecting to be listed in the ILA directory required clarification to ascertain descriptive data, including number of programs, program locations, and program types and affiliations. This data was also further substantiated by a second round of data collection and confirmation.

### Phase 2 – Leadership Programs Website Data Collection

In the second phase of the study, LLRC researchers examined the website of every program initially listed in the directory (n=1,572), to ensure accurate program, contact, and institution information. This included identifying which programs were no longer offered and correcting inaccurate listing of degree type, name, and contact information within the database. Through examination of institutional websites, the research team determined two programs listed in the United States list were international programs, eight programs were duplicates entered multiple times, and four programs no longer exist as of Spring 2018. Therefore, the final number of academic leadership programs remaining in the study is

1,558. After this process, the websites were visited a second time to acquire information on course offerings and course sequencing, as well as program mission and vision statements. Additionally, Carnegie classifications were added to the data, with the assistance of the Carnegie classifications in higher education website (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2017). The data acquired was analyzed for further information about programs based on discipline, focus of the program, courses, and affiliations.

## Academic Leadership Programs in the United States

The academic leadership programs in this study represent a diverse group of degree types, including associates (n = 13), certificates (n = 241), bachelors (majors and minors; n=324), master’s (n = 651), and doctoral (n = 329). Within these varying options, degree programs are housed within a wealth of different disciplines or are often interdisciplinary. Figure 1 presents the academic degree programs represented in the sample

Figure 2. Affiliation of Institutions with Academic Leadership Programs

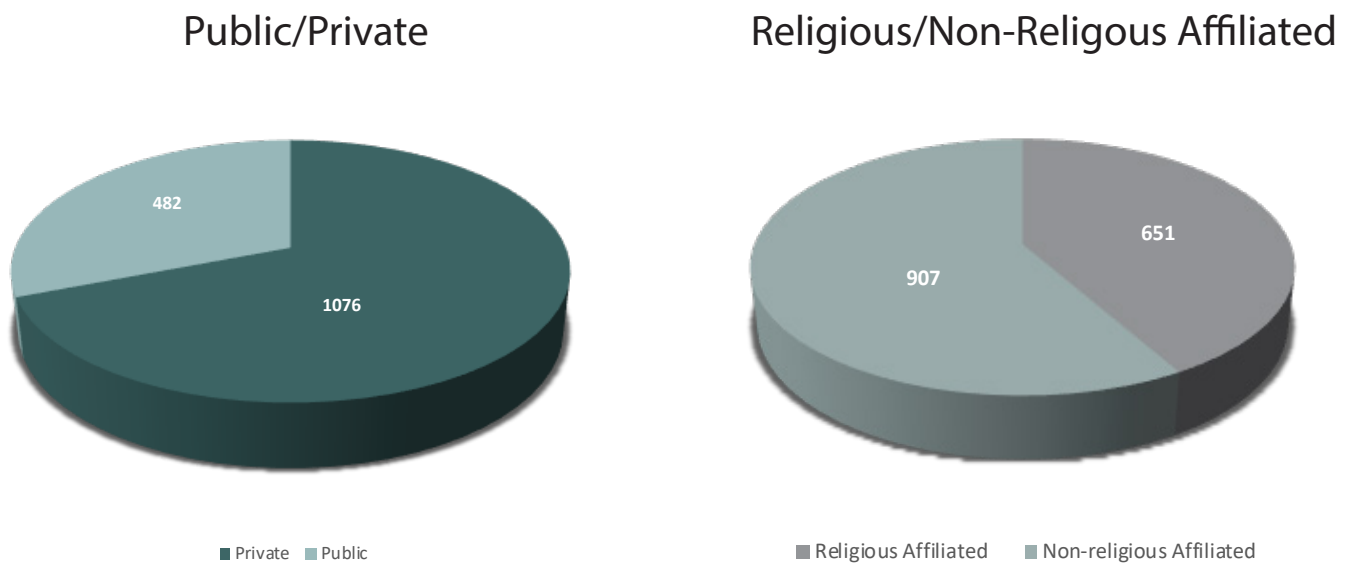
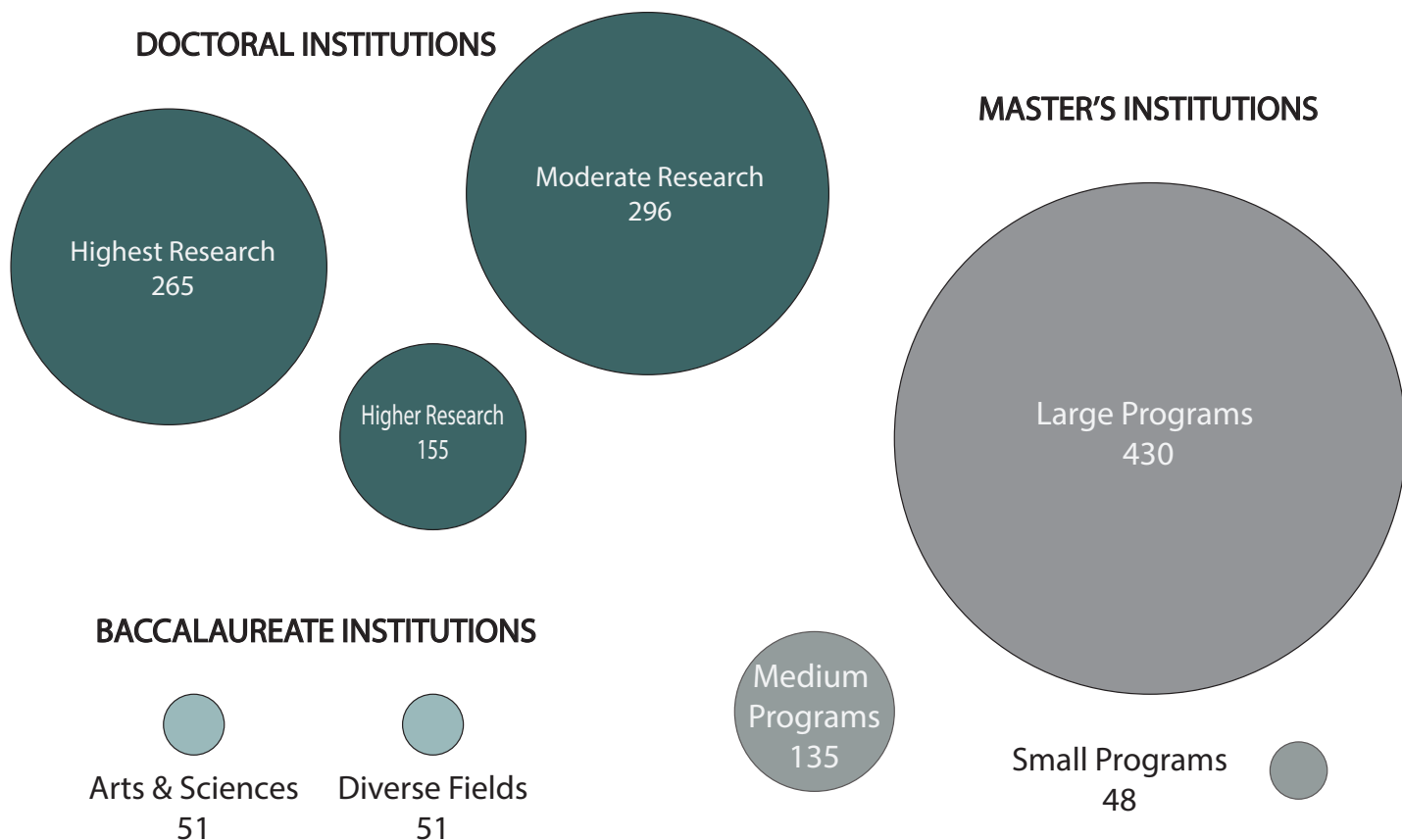


Figure 3. Academic Leadership Programs in the US by Carnegie Classifications



further delineated into degree type for each area. Bachelor's degrees offer nearly twice as many programs with leadership majors (n = 206) than minors (n = 118). Leadership certificates are offered overwhelmingly at the graduate level. The database contains 59 programs offering undergraduate leadership certificates compared to 170 graduate leadership certificate programs. Twelve certificate programs were not able to be identified by level. Degree programs offering a Master of Arts (n = 216) and Sciences (n = 190) as well as doctorates of education (n = 167) and philosophy (n = 125) present the most frequent graduate level degrees.

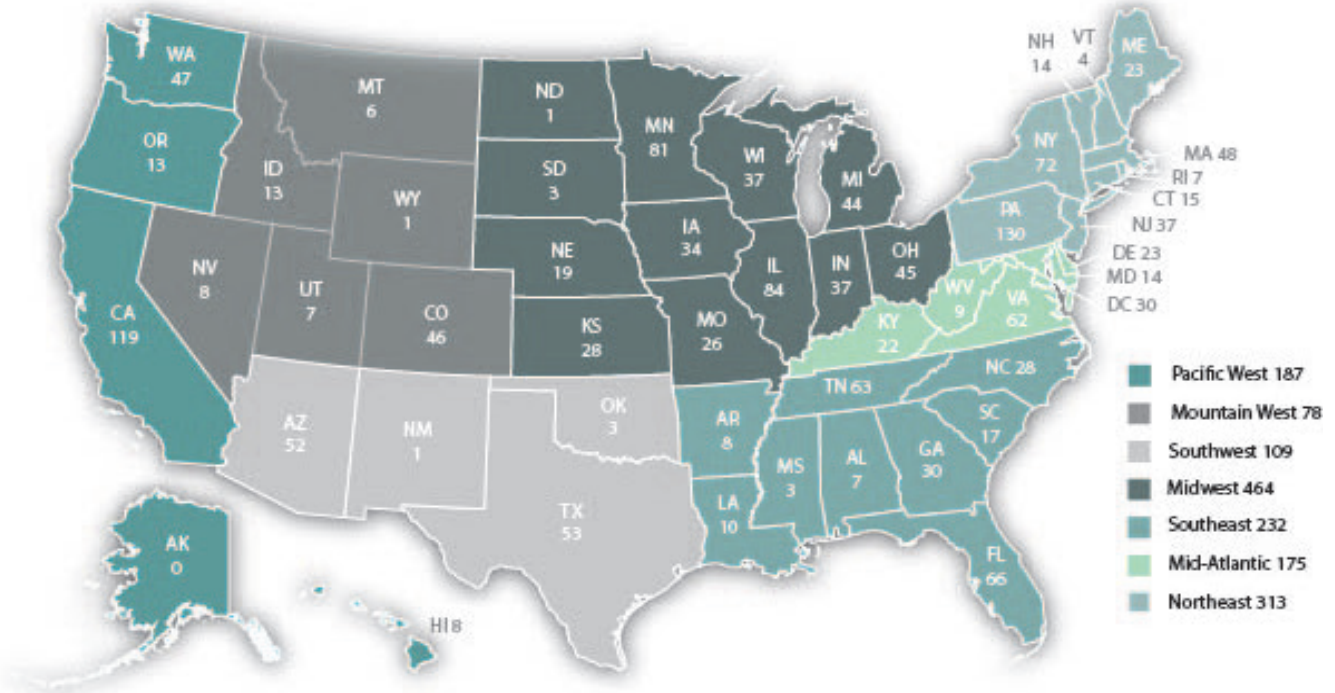
### Affiliation

The programs represented in the directory are from public and private, and religious and non-religious affiliated institutions. Currently, the directory is overrepresented with private institutions (n = 1076) as compared to public (n =

482). There are a large number of non-religious affiliated institutions (n = 907) as compared to religious affiliated (n = 651) who elected to place their program in the directory. See Figure 2.

Reviewing the Carnegie classifications of the institutions listed in the directory yields data regarding what types of schools are most likely to contain leadership-related academic programs. Larger master's colleges and universities have the most prevalent representation of programs (n = 430), followed by the moderate research doctoral universities (n = 292). Doctoral universities have the largest number of leadership-related programs overall (n = 716). Figure 3 presents a data visualization of the Carnegie classification breakdown by institutional type. Not included in the chart are special topics institutions, due to a small sample, and institutions not rated in the Carnegie database.

Figure 4. Academic Leadership Programs by State and Region



### States and Regions

The directory represents programs from forty-nine states in the US and covers all regions. The states of California (n = 119), Minnesota (n = 81), and Florida (n = 66) contain the most programs listed per state. Only one state, Alaska, does not have any leadership programs listed in the directory.

The project also considered the degree program data by region within the United States. The ILA directory includes leadership programs from regions across the United States including the Pacific West, Mountain West, Midwest, Southwest, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and the District of Columbia (included in the Mid-Atlantic region). The regions with the highest percentage of leadership programs, considering the amount of states included in the region, are the Northeast (39%), the Midwest (38%), and the Pacific West (37%). See Figure 4 for a map presenting the programs offered by state and region.

### Courses within Leadership Programs

To further explore and understand leadership

programs in the United States, the study captured course offering and sequencing data on course websites for all 1,558 programs. Of these programs, 1,174 provided data on course offerings within their programs. The information on course offerings was further analyzed to examine course sequencing and types of courses most frequently offered within leadership programs represented in the study.

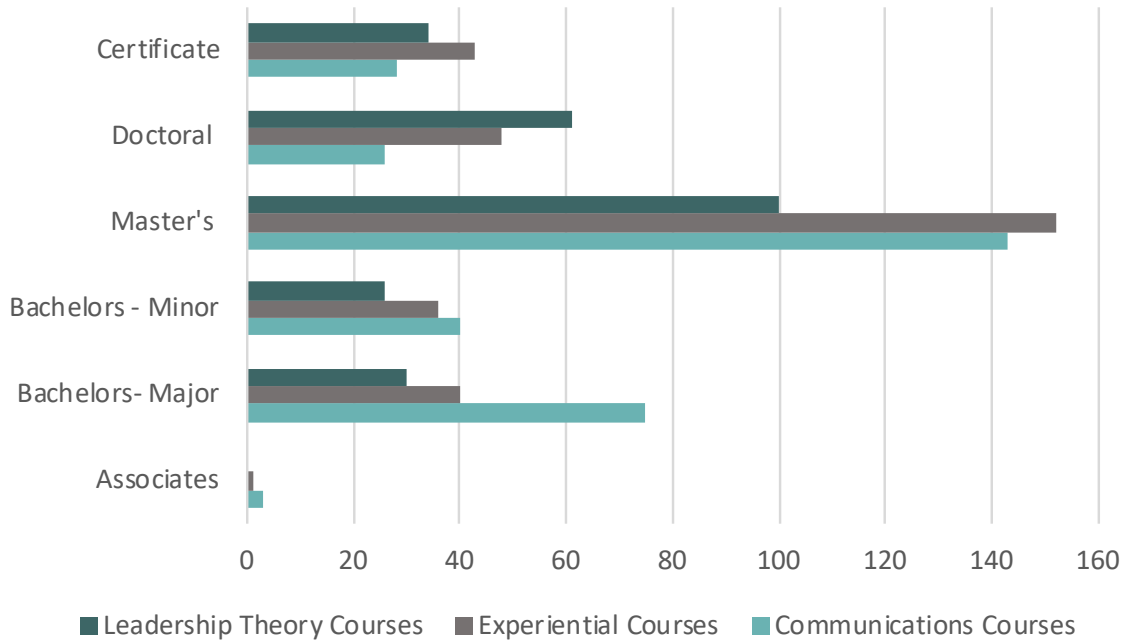
Although all leadership programs vary by discipline and course offerings, we found consistency across programs for course offerings in communication and experiential leadership learning classes. When exploring courses focused on leadership theory, a smaller amount than anticipated were identifiable by course title or description that directly entail leadership theory. See Figure 5 for a comparison of courses offered in leadership theories, experiential learning, and communications across degree programs.

### LEADERSHIP THEORIES

A foundational course in most disciplines,



Figure 5. Courses within Academic Leadership Programs



the researchers anticipated theories or foundational paradigms of leadership as a critical course in many leadership programs. In examining all of the courses gathered in the second phase of data collection reviewing program websites, the researchers applied search criterion for the terms leadership theory, leadership theories, leadership foundations, and foundations of leadership to extrapolate the number and types of leadership theories courses

being offered from programs in the study. Surprisingly few courses were directly titled or expressed clearly in their course description a direct focus in leadership theories. Only 251 courses were found within the search terms described. See Figure 6.

The courses found identify master's (n = 100) programs to contain a higher number of leadership theory courses. Twenty-two percent of bachelor's degree programs offer coursework

Figure 6. Leadership Theories Courses

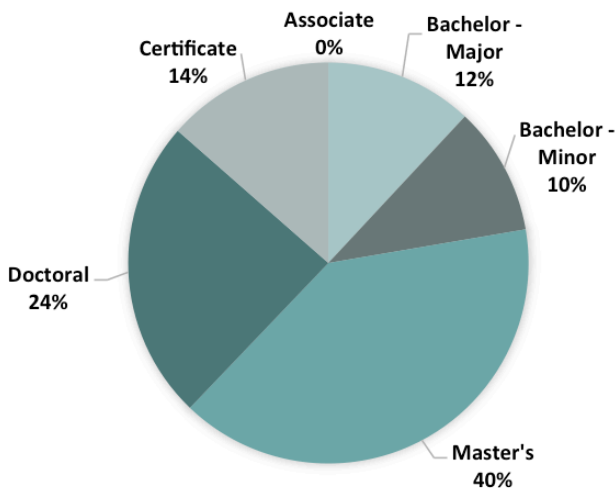
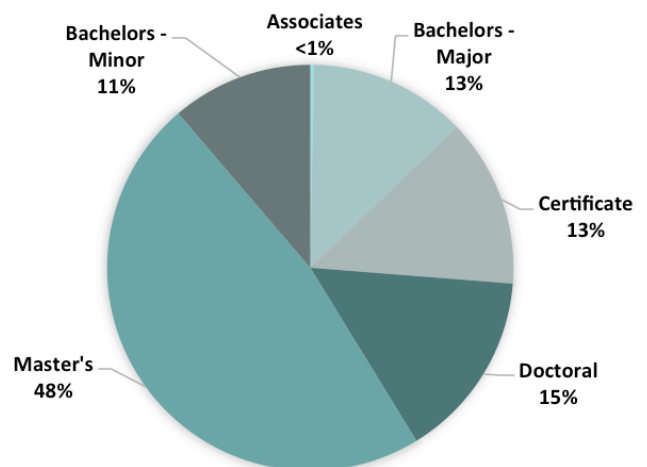


Figure 7. Experiential Learning Courses



in leadership theories. Of the doctoral programs analyzed, only 24% offered leadership theories coursework. While this might initially seem unusual, the diversity of discipline specific doctoral programs (i.e. nursing, education, organizational studies) may explain the smaller amount of leadership theories specific coursework.

### EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning presents a broad category of possible courses in leadership-focused programs. The data from Figure 7 represents courses entitled or referenced in the course description that include elements of experiential learning. Key words searched include experiential, experience, internship, practicum, and capstone. With 320 courses identified in the data, the experiential curricular model exhibits a popular option in leadership program coursework. It is clear experiential learning is most emphasized in the practice-orientated foci of master's level programs, which encompass nearly half (48%) of the total experiential courses offered.

### COMMUNICATION

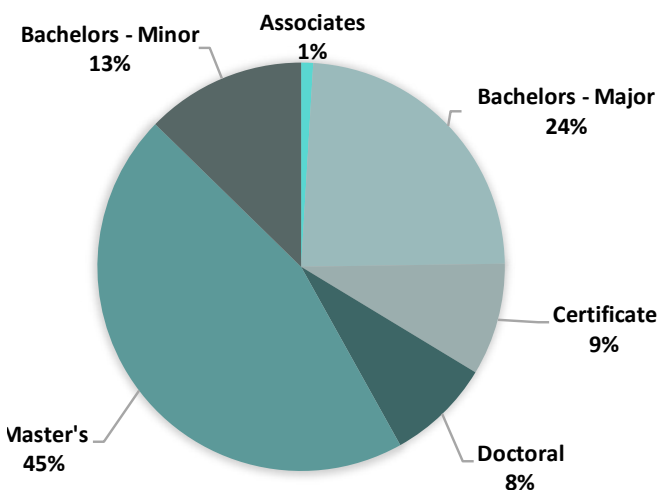
As a critical element of successful leadership entails capacity and acumen in communication skills, the study explored courses in the data

focused on the theme of communication. Key words searched include communication and communications. Courses identified ranged from topics in business communication, strategic communication, interpersonal communication, global and multicultural communication, and communication and leadership. Most communication courses in the leadership programs represented came from either master's programs (n = 143) or bachelor's degree programs (n = 115). See Figure 8.

## Future Directions

The next phase of the Academic Leadership Programs in the United States project will include exploring the disciplines represented in the dataset, the structuring of courses in the programs, and institution and program mission and visions. A pilot study including a survey and follow-up interview process are in process to collect additional information from academic leadership programs beyond what can be gathered on institutional websites. Leadership education scholarship requires further in-depth information about academic leadership programs to understand our current state and our future; the Academic Leadership Programs in the United States project seeks to extend this research to provide this foundational knowledge for the field.

Figure 8. Communication Courses



## References

- Ayman, R., Adams, S., Fisher, B., & Hartman, E. (2003). Leadership development in higher education institutions: A present and future perspective. In S. E. Murphy & R. E. Riggio (Eds.), *The future of leadership development*. (pp. 201-222). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S., Allen, K. E., Burkhardt, J. C., Cress, C. M., Flores, R. A.... Zimmerman-Oster, K. A. (2000). *Leadership reconsidered: Engaging higher education in social change*. Battle Creek, Michigan: W.K. Kellogg.

- Brown, F. W., & Fritz, S. M. (1994). Determining the breadth of leadership and human resource management/development offerings in post-secondary departments of agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 35(3), 1-5.
- Brungardt, C. (1997). The making of leaders: A review of the research in leadership development and education. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 3(3), 81-95.
- Brungardt, C. L., Gould, L. V., Moore, R., & Potts, J. (1998). The emergence of leadership studies: Linking the traditional outcomes of liberal education with leadership development. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 4(3), 53-67.
- Brungardt, C., Greenleaf, J., Brungardt, C., & Arensdorf, J. (2006). Majoring in leadership: A review of undergraduate leadership degree programs. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 5(1), 4-25.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (2017). Institution lookup. Retrieved from <http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/lookup/lookup.php>.
- Chambers, T. (1994). Criteria to evaluate student leadership programs: What leadership educators consider important. *NASPA Journal*, 31, 225-234.
- Gigliotti, R. A. (2015) "Streams of influence" in student affairs: A renewed emphasis on leadership education. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 52, 427-439.
- Guthrie, K. L., & Jenkins, D. M. (2018). *The role of leadership educators: Transforming learning*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- International Leadership Association. (2016). Leadership Program Directory. Retrieved from <http://www.ila-net.org/Resources/LPD/index.htm>
- Komives, S. R. (2011). Advancing leadership education. In S. K. Komives, J. D. Dugan, J. E. Owen, C. Slack, W. Wagner, & Associates (Eds.), *The handbook for student leadership development* (2nd ed.; pp. 1-34). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Komives, S. R., Dugan, J. D., Owen, J. E., Slack, C., Wagner, W., & Associates. (2011). *The handbook for student leadership development* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mandicott, W., & Bowling, T. (2002). Credentialing leadership programs. *Concepts & Connections*, 10(2), 1-13.
- Owen, J. E. (2008). Towards an empirical typology of collegiate leadership development programs: Examining effects on student self-efficacy and leadership for social change (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/8491?show=full>
- Owen, J. E. & Komives, S. R. (2007). Does credit matter? Examining the effects of curricular leadership programs. *Concepts & Connections*, 14(3), 4-6.
- Reinelt, C., & Russon, C. (2003). Evaluating the outcomes and impacts of leadership development programs: Selected findings and lessons learned from a scan of fifty-five programs. In C. Cherrey, J. J. Gardiner, & N. Huber (Eds.), *Building leadership bridges* (pp.119-136). College Park, MD: International Leadership Association.
- Reisberg, L. (October 30, 1998). Students gain sense of direction in new field of leadership studies. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 45(10), A49-A50.
- Roberts, D. C. (Ed.). (1981). Student leadership programs in higher education. Carbondale, IL: American College Personnel Association.
- Watkins, S. (in process). Contributions of student affairs professional organizations to collegiate student leadership programs in the late twentieth century (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).