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TITLE: A hard look at soft skill development

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of co-curricular programming on soft skill development and career readiness of students in a leadership development program. For the purpose of this study, career readiness is defined as “the attainment of demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace” (NACE, 2014).

NATURE OF RESEARCH: This study was conducted at a research university in a southwestern state of the United States. This study will provide a glimpse at students from all majors who participate in the Professional Leadership Program (PLP). An emotional intelligence assessment will be utilized for the pre and posttest structure of this research. For the presentation, preliminary findings will be presented as well as discussion over areas of concern.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Two theories guided the effectiveness of programming on college students: Baxter-Magolda’s self-authorship theory (2004) and Kolb’s experiential learning theory (2015). Both emphasize the importance of individual development in college through self-discovery and accessing resources available to students.

METHODS: Will be gathered from 125 students involved in PLP. They will be assessed on their emotional intelligence and softs skills upon entry into the program in August, and then again at the completion of the program next May, 2018. The data will include demographic information as well as number of job offers, starting salary ranges, and employment status. Data shared extended over 2 semesters in the 2017-2018 academic year.

KEY FINDINGS: We hope to find out how students are being impacted from a program like PLP, as well as be able to share what their career outcomes have been.

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KEY WORDS: career readiness, career outcomes, student engagement, co-curricular programming, effectiveness