

RURAL-URBAN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (RULE) ASSESSMENT

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The purpose of this study was to determine the outcomes and to offer improvement recommendations for the Rural-Urban Leadership Program (RULE) an agricultural-based leadership program. The RULE program is an agricultural-based leadership program that is administered by Penn State Extension under the College of Agricultural Sciences of Penn State University. Specifically, this study utilized the ten-point RULE curriculum plan and RULE program objectives to determine anticipated outcomes of RULE participants. Alumni were also asked to offer suggestions for RULE program improvement regarding curriculum and alumni engagement.

This study identified the outcomes and recommendations for programmatic improvement of the RULE program through a mixed-methods approach involving ten semi-structured interviews and a Qualtrics survey instrument. The sample population for both the semi-structured interview and the Qualtrics survey consisted of alumni that participated in the program over the last 9 Study Institutes or 15 years. There was a total of 206 alumni that completed the program, and 196 were accessible through email. Of the 196 accessible alumni, a total of 74 completed the Qualtrics survey which is a survey response rate of 38%.

Numerous positive outcomes were found due to participation in the RULE program including but not limited to an increase in confidence, communication skills, leadership aspirations, professional and personal networks, understanding of agricultural practices, and

understanding of the legislative process. This study also found that RULE alumni valued the program and for most of the alumni the program had exceeded their expectations. Alumni did suggest improvements for the program which included but not limited to curriculum modifications, the inclusion of more rigorous assignments including public speaking, and creating different tiers of participants. Alumni also suggested that there should be greater alumni engagement regarding communication, development, and educational opportunities.

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PREFACE

There have been numerous individuals that have supported me through my educational journey that has culminated not only in this project but also the endgame of achieving a terminal degree. I would like to thank my dissertation committee for guiding me through the process of narrowing my focus and providing me with solid direction for successfully finishing. Dr. Kevin Crowley, Dr. Deno De Ciantis, and Dr. John Weidman have all been incredibly helpful, and for that, I will be eternally grateful. Special thanks to Dr. John Weidman for helping to guide me through the various steps in the process and ensuring that deadlines were met and the proper “hoops were jumped through.”

Looking back over the years of my educational and professional journey I have had several strong role models and mentors that always challenged me to do better. Richard Dana Benton, took a poor kid from Bradford, PA under his wing and pushed me to achieve academically and instilled a sense of community. This community involvement created a measurable level of confidence in my abilities to become a leader in all facets of my life. Dr. Marvin Thomas, who through my undergraduate years kept me focused not only academically but provided me with challenging assignments that provided rigor for the challenges of graduate school. Dr. Stewart Sutin, who while I was in the midst of a career change encouraged me to apply for leadership positions in higher education that I was not quite sure I was qualified for.

He also provided me through his teaching a general understanding of how this niche of education functions as it is entirely different than secondary education.

On a professional level when it came to pursuing this degree and completing this project I could not have done it without the support of Bill Kleiner. Bill initially pushed for me to join Penn State Extension in a leadership capacity. Since that time he has acted as a mentor and a professional confidant. Bill also suggested that I participate in the RULE program and as an alumnus of the program he was fully supportive of this project. By joining the RULE program, I was introduced to J.D. Dunbar and Tara Homan. J.D. and Tara have been invaluable for this project. The two of them are the RULE program, and without them, this would not have been possible. Any request that I made in regards to documents, interviews, or alumni information was always met without question although it had to have been a little disconcerting as I was assessing their program.

My family also played a crucial role in this process even from the earliest days. I can still remember getting my first but not last C on a math test in elementary school. The dread of showing the quiz to my Ron and Rhonda because they would be both disappointed and upset was almost unbearable. I was grounded for my performance on that quiz which instilled a sense of failure was not an option at a young age. Their support through my undergraduate and graduate years both financially and emotionally was also indispensable. My stepfather Scott, who always showed an interest and probably had a better understanding than most of what I was doing on many of my assignments over the years. My younger sister Jacquelyn who has also achieved academically always held me to a higher standard than I probably deserved. She also pushed me to do better as explaining myself to her is not an enjoyable experience. Through the years as I have pursued my various degrees we have also had some fun times that kept me grounded.

Last but not least is my beautiful wife, Karen. She has been with me through it all. I guess that is what happens when you end up marrying the girl you had a crush on in high school. Making the move to Pittsburgh turned out to be the best decision of my life both personally and professionally. Karen agreed to be my “sugar-mama” as I pursued yet another graduate degree and decided to pursue a different career in higher education. A little after a year of being out of school and being gainfully employed she did not even blink when I told her that I wanted to pursue another degree. It has been a quick three years that not only included coursework but also Karen agreeing to marry me and the birth of our beautiful daughter, Natalie, a couple of months ago. Natalie in my fair opinion is the cutest baby who has her daddy wrapped around her little fingers already.

To all of those students in rural America that might not have grown up with an ounce of privilege I want to say, you can do it. Whatever that “it” is you can achieve it. Achieving that objective might take you longer, and the path will never be straight. Taking an inspirational quote from the sage of wisdom Rocky Balboa, “It ain’t about how hard you hit. It’s about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward”.

FIN

1.0 CHAPTER ONE

1.1 OVERVIEW OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to assess the Rural-Urban Leadership (RULE) Program leadership development program housed at The Pennsylvania State University. The RULE program was established to help develop more effective leaders throughout all of Pennsylvania not just rural areas. According to Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a), the College of Agricultural Sciences administers the RULE Program through Penn State Extension. The Pennsylvania State University has been affiliated with the RULE program for the last 30 years, and in 2015, the RULE program officially came under the umbrella of Penn State Extension according to Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016b).

The RULE program encourages, supports, and helps to develop leaders for all segments of Pennsylvania, not just those directly involved in agriculture or those that reside in only rural areas according to J. D. Dunbar, RULE Chief Executive Officer (personal communication, October 26, 2016). The primary objectives of the RULE program cited by the Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a) are to engage its participants who come from all over Pennsylvania in public issues, improve personal networks through networking skills, enhance public decision making along with recognizing group dynamics and create sustainable relationships between the participants and stakeholders. As is shown in Figure 1.1 from the Rural-Urban Leadership

Program (2016a) the RULE program defines several objectives that participants should achieve by actively participating in the program.

- Increased understanding of the economic, political, cultural and social forces inherent to the public decision making process.
- Enhanced knowledge of the application of leadership skills, processes and strategies to resolve conflict.
- The ability to study community problems and issues from a broad economic, political, cultural and social perspective.
- Increased understanding of contemporary social and economic problems and policy issues, and how to effectively impact public policy.
- An understanding of the budgetary concerns encountered by rural/urban communities.
- An enhanced awareness of international relations and the world economy.
- A broadened understanding of the legislative process and legislative procedure.
- Increased ability and opportunity to participate in local government and non-profit community organizations.
- Expanded and strengthened leadership skills, the catalyst for the democratic process.

Figure 1.1: How can you benefit from the RULE Program? from the Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a).

Recently, the name of the program was changed from the Pennsylvania Rural Leadership Program to the Rural-Urban Leadership Program to achieve a greater diversity of participants from all lifestyles across the Commonwealth according to Tara Homan, Program Assistant for RULE (personal communication, October 26, 2016). The RULE program is one of five programs based at a land-grant university that is not purely agriculturally based. It is a statewide program whose origin is agriculturally-based, but topics and issues address the whole spectrum across the Commonwealth according to J.D. Dunbar (personal communication, October 26, 2016).

Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a) stated that the RULE program is part of a larger consortium of agricultural leadership programs known as the International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leadership (IAPAL). According to Kansas Agriculture and Rural

Leadership (2016), IAPAL programs are located across the country in most states including New York, Ohio, and Michigan. Other nations including Australia, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, and Scotland also have IAPAL programs. According to Black (2006) and Abington-Cooper (2005), statewide agricultural leadership programs have existed for decades, and in their work, they also found that they exist in numerous states across the country and other nations. Taxpayers, industry, sponsors, and the participants have invested millions of dollars, and thousands of alumni have gone through the programs according to Kaufman and Rudd (2006).

Heltowski (2000) and Black and Earnest (2009) cited that the challenges that face the United States whether in the urban areas or rural regions are ever changing. These problems include but are not limited to economic issues, environmental issues, political issues, and social issues. Williams and Lindsey (2014) stated that the problems facing these areas are made further complex due to the globalization of our economy. The ability to respond to these matters whatever they might be depends highly on available leadership at the local, state, and national levels.

Agricultural leadership programs have a long history in the United States reaching back to the 1930's according to Kelsey and Wall (2003). In the 1930's as is the case today, there is a need for leadership programs that teach individuals how to manage and lead change in the rural environment. According to Avant and Copeland (2013), programs are required to educate and prepare citizens to assume leadership positions in not only rural America but other communities within the country as well.

Many land-grant institutions across the country realized the need for effective rural leaders, so they began to develop agricultural leadership programs. Some of these programs are administered through outreach departments or other entities within the universities; Cooperative

Extension runs the majority of them. Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016) cited that as of 2000 that at least half of the agricultural leadership programs run at land-grant universities were administered through Cooperative Extension.

Considering that, numerous programs exist across the country and have existed for decades that would lead to the general assumption that there is an abundance of data to back the investments put into the agricultural leadership programs. These investments include not only money but also time and other resources into these programs. According to Russon and Reinhelt (2004) along with Diem and Nikola (2005) that is not the case as there are a limited amount of studies and corresponding literature on the assessment of agricultural leadership programs. Most of the agricultural leadership program's impacts have gone unassessed, or if there have been assessments, they are underreported.

When programs are evaluated methods and what is assessed varies widely according to Russon and Reinhelt (2004). Most of the evaluations are short-term assessments that occur shortly after participants leave the agricultural leadership program and measure satisfaction with the program. Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Campbell (1996) stated, that what is needed is more comprehensive evaluations that are longitudinal in nature and measure whether the programs did have a positive effect on participant's careers and leadership trajectory. According to Kelsey and Wall (2003) and Kaufman and Rudd (2006), another evaluative tool could include whether employers or even the communities where the participants reside identify any positive impact from participating in the program.

1.2 PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

According to Kansas Agriculture and Rural Leadership (2016), most IAPAL member programs have a two-year curriculum designed for up to 30 participants selected through different application processes. Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a) cited that the RULE program is rigorous resembling the rest of the IAPAL programs. The RULE program takes place over an 18-month period usually on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays for a total of 32 days of workshops over 10 Study Institutes. Direct participant engagement with the curriculum takes place for a minimum of 350 hours. According to J.D. Dunbar (personal communication, October 26, 2016), this does not include the off-hour time that is spent with classmates and other stakeholders during the evening hours of the Study Institutes or in the participant's free time together outside of the Study Institutes.

Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2010) stated the overall objective of the RULE program is to create effective leaders for Pennsylvania at all levels of government and across the wide-breadth of its different communities. According to Rural-Urban Leadership program (2016a) by utilizing a ten-point curriculum, the RULE program aims to improve the program participant's ability to have a greater understanding of public and agricultural issues. The program also endeavors to help participants communicate successfully, network effectively, positively interact with government officials, improve group dynamics, and improve the self-confidence all in the effort to create effective leaders.

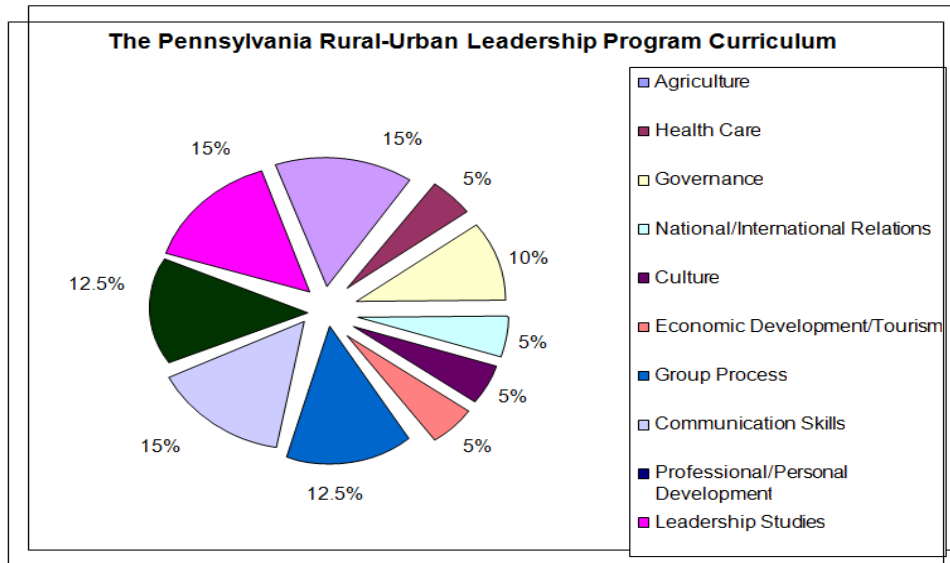


Figure 1.2: The Pennsylvania Rural-Urban Leadership Program Curriculum from Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2015a).

As is shown in Figure 1.2 the RULE program is divided into ten distinct curriculum areas taken from Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2015a). According to J.D. Dunbar (personal communication, October 26, 2016), each Study Institute is designed to address multiple layers of the established curriculum. Each Study Institute does not deal with every aspect of the curriculum, but over the 10 Study Institutes through the workshops, seminars, and programs they are all addressed.

Figure 1.3 indicates that each curriculum area is broken down further by various sub-topics according to Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2015a). For instance, Communication Skills is divided into public speaking, active listening, conflict resolution, and meeting management. According to J.D. Dunbar (personal communication, October 26, 2016), the idea is to build on existing skills and knowledge to provide an understanding of the issues at all levels of community and government that face Pennsylvania and to emphasize the ability to communicate within that environment.

Professional/Personal Development (12.5%)

- ☞ Individual Learning Contracts
 - ☞ Visioning
- ☞ Leadership Self Assessments (3)
 - ☞ Leadership Philosophy
 - ☞ Mentoring

Leadership Studies (15%)

- ☞ Leadership Theory
 - ☞ Ethics
- ☞ Community Simulations
- ☞ Leadership Philosophies
 - ☞ Managing Change
- ☞ Resource Sharing Leadership Programs

Governance (10%)

- ☞ Structure
- ☞ Legislation
- ☞ Lobbying
- ☞ Impacting Public Policy

National/International Relations (5%)

- ☞ Leadership In The Military
- ☞ Global Leadership/Nuffield

Group Process (12.5%)

- ☞ Team Building
- ☞ Public Issue Study

Communication Skills (15%)

- ☞ Public Speaking
- ☞ Active Listening
- ☞ Conflict Resolution
- ☞ Meeting Management

Agriculture (15%)

- ☞ Agribusiness
- ☞ Land Use & Environmental Issues
- ☞ Innovative Agricultural Practices
 - ☞ Family Farms
 - ☞ Organic

Healthcare (5%)

Culture (5%)

Economic Development/Tourism (5%)

- ☞ Community Development
 - ☞ Capacity Building
- ☞ Alternative Energy/Entrepreneurship

175 hours contact programming per year
350 contact hours in two years of RULE programming
32 days

Figure 1.3: The Pennsylvania Rural-Urban Leadership Program Breakdown from Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2015a).

The aim of this study is to assess the extent to which the alumni of the RULE program perceived improvements in the objectives put forth by the program, determine what the RULE program alumni valued the most about their experience in the program, and offer the opportunity for RULE program alumni to make suggestions for program improvement.

1.2.1 Inquiry Questions

Building upon previous research on agricultural leadership programs this problem of practice will use an electronic survey instrument through Qualtrics and a semi-structured interview instrument to provide an assessment of the RULE program. Through reviewing the relevant literature; interests of the RULE program director and the RULE program assistant, the researcher's experience as a current participant in the program, and the adult learning theory of Boshier (1971) and Boshier (1991) the following inquiry questions were formed to guide the study:

1. What did alumni of RULE perceive they gained from participation in the program?
2. What aspects of the RULE program experience did alumni find to be the most valuable?
3. What would alumni of RULE suggest to improve the program?

1.2.2 Research Setting

Although the RULE program is based on the campus of The Pennsylvania State University very little of the program takes place on campus at University Park, PA. The program consists of 10 Study Institutes spread over an 18-month period. According to Tara Homan (personal communication, October 26, 2016), some institutes take place in rural areas such as Leola, PA or Bedford, PA while others take place in cities such as Pittsburgh, PA, and Harrisburg, PA. Washington, DC is also the site of one of the Institutes in the second year of the RULE program.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

As is the case with many of the other programs in the IAPAL, the RULE program does thorough assessments while participants are in the program: these include pre-evaluations, mid-term evaluations, and post-evaluations (The Rural-Urban Leadership Program, 2016a). What many of the programs in the IAPAL, including the RULE program, are lacking is a follow up with alumni after they have left the program years later. In the follow-up with alumni years after exiting the program, it is the hope of this researcher to understand what alumni believe they gained from the program, what they valued about their experience, and what they would suggest for improvement.

This research is intended not only to provide assessment information for the RULE program. Since the RULE program is part of the IAPAL, the intent is also to help inform curriculum decisions and suggest improvements to other programs in the IAPAL. It is essential for the RULE program to learn about their curricular decisions and impact. It is also important that similar programs learn what alumni suggest for curriculum and overall improvement. This is important because, as Williams and Lindsey (2014) suggest, in the larger picture of leadership development programs there is little focus on agricultural and rural leadership development programs.

1.3.1 Stakeholders

The RULE program is an investment of resources for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a) stated that Pennsylvania provides the majority of program funds through the Department of Community and Economic Development under Act 65

of 1992 entitled, the Rural Leadership Training Act. In previous years, the investment on the part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania reached as high as \$250,000. The investment on the part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 2016 totaled \$100,000 according to the Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016b).

According to The Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a), The Pennsylvania State University through its College of Agricultural Sciences and Penn State Extension provide the base out of which the RULE program operates. The Pennsylvania State University provides a physical space and in-kind support for the program and employs a Program Assistant, a RULE Program Director who also holds the rank of Senior Extension Educator, and a RULE Program Faculty Advisor who is a Professor of Agricultural, Environmental, and Regional Economics.

According to Kansas Agriculture and Rural Leadership (2016) and Diem and Nikola (2005), IAPAL affiliates encourage corporations, businesses, foundations, and other stakeholder organization to invest in the agricultural leadership programs financially. The RULE program is no different in that it does encourage and rely on investments of stakeholder organizations according to the Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016b). Organizations such as the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, and MidAtlantic Farm Credit are some of the groups that invest in the RULE program. These organizations might contribute to the general support of the RULE program or can sponsor specific events such as meals or activities.

Participants in the RULE program come from all over Pennsylvania not just rural areas. The backgrounds of participants are diverse in that they might be farmers, producers, or involved in agribusiness according to Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2010). Others are community leaders and officials at the local and state level. Participants have also been educators or from

business and private industries that may or may not be related to agriculture. According to J.D. Dunbar (personal communication, October 26, 2016), the common core of the participants is whatever their background they do have a commitment to solving problems that affect their communities.

As a participant in the RULE program, there is an investment of resources most notably time and money. The Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a) stated the RULE program has a value of over \$25,000 for each participant. According to Tara Homan (personal communication, October 26, 2016), each of the participants is expected to contribute \$3,500 over the 18-month period for their leadership development and investment in the program. In some instances, the participants pay for their investment while in other their employers might pay for their tuition. Limited scholarships are also available for those who qualify

According to J. D. Dunbar (personal communication, October 26, 2016), there is another cost in that participants are required to invest their own time which includes weekends and a weekday or two for each of the 10 Study Institutes. Participants who have very supportive work situations might be able to count the Study Institute as a workday while others have to take vacation days or days off unpaid to attend. Other real costs include travel around the various sites across Pennsylvania. Included in this are hours of travel time and money invested in fuel. Tara Homan (personal communication, October 26, 2016) stated that many of the meals are taken care of through the RULE program, but some of the lunches and many of the dinners are paid for by the participants themselves while at the Study Institutes.

The RULE program also relies heavily on speakers and facilitators who give of their time and travel to present and act as facilitators at Study Institutes according to J. D. Dunbar (personal communication, October 26, 2016). The speakers are usually not compensated for their time and

travel. In most cases, the speakers are invited to participate in the events of the day that could include meals. Tara Homan (personal communication, October 26, 2016) stated that compensation for facilitator participation is also not included. Meals and lodging for the facilitators is provided at the Study Institutes for their involvement.

Currently, the RULE program boasts an alumni base of 626 individuals according to Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2015b). As alumni, many stay active in the RULE program by acting as speakers or facilitators for the Study Institutes. Alumni also have the opportunity to serve on the RULE Advisory Board. According to Rural Urban-Leadership Program (2016a) and J.D. Dunbar (personal communication, October 26, 2016), some alumni open up their businesses or homes for Study Institutes while others volunteer at events that the RULE program participates in such as the Pennsylvania Farm Show or Ag Progress Days. Another option that many alumni take to support the RULE program is by providing donations towards the continuation of the program. There is also a RULE Alumni Association that alumni can join to continue their support of the RULE program.

1.4 SUMMARY

This study provides an assessment of the RULE program from the perspective of its alumni over the last 15 years. Specifically, this project focuses on what the alumni believe they gained from participating in the program, what they valued about the program, and what they would recommend for improving the program. Although there are, numerous agricultural leadership programs across the country and internationally there is a lack of assessments after participants graduate from the program and begin to use the skills and knowledge that they learned from the

programs. This study seeks to inform the RULE program about the effectiveness of its curriculum model and to provide guidance on how the RULE program and other programs in the IAPAL consortium can improve from the perspective of its former participants.

This study did not attempt to address all of the RULE alumni of the last 30 years. The focus of this study was on the latter half of participants that have graduated from the RULE program. This study also did not try to address how RULE alumni used their new skill sets and knowledge to pursue leadership positions although information in this regard did come up in the semi-structured interviews and was included in the results. This study also did not ascertain whether alumni were promoted to specific positions or found themselves taking on extensive leadership positions because of participation in RULE as other leadership assessments have done. This study instead asked to what extent participants aspired to greater leadership positions and to what extent alumni have found themselves experiencing greater leadership responsibilities.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO

2.1 BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Since the inception of agricultural leadership programs decades ago, there have been attempts to evaluate these programs on an individual level such as the studies done by Diem and Nikola (2005) or Black and Earnest (2009). Recently, Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016) conducted a successful study on the macro-level where they performed an evaluation of agricultural leadership programs in the southeastern United States. Heltowski (2000) also evaluated some different leadership programs, which included agricultural leadership programs.

In order to understand the experiences of participants that completed the RULE program, this literature review will first examine and attempt to provide a broad definition of leadership. As this study's research population are graduates of agricultural leadership programs at a land-grant university, the history and the characteristics of those programs will be discussed.

The objective of this literature review is to examine what previous studies found about what agricultural leadership program participants perceived they gained from participation in the programs. Another goal was to find what recommendations were offered for agricultural leadership programs from alumni. The issue of a lack of ongoing formal evaluation of agricultural leadership program is also a common thread throughout the literature that is examined.

2.1.1 Leadership

A central concept in community development and leadership emphasizes the importance of local participation as a means of strengthening the community. Hustedde and Woodward (1996) used the term “capacity building” to define the key to addressing problems in communities. According to Hustedde and Woodward (1996), capacity building enhances the potential of local community members to address and consequently solve problems.

Martin and Wilkinson (1985) concurred in that community leaders provide the basis for improving the quality of life in rural America. Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Campbell (1996), also claimed a central concept in community development emphasizes the importance of participation as a means of strengthening rural leadership. According to Williams and Lindsay (2011), leadership development programs can enhance the ability of individuals to participate and develop leadership skills.

According to Avant and Copeland (2013), the challenges facing leadership are increasingly complex and at times influenced by events that are in no way under their control. In order to find and enact solutions, leaders must be equipped with the skills and capacity to deal with the issues. According to Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (2000), to address these problems, the definition of leadership must expand from those that are in leadership to those individuals equipped with the ability to bring about positive change. In doing this, we can empower more of our citizens to be larger stakeholders in the future of their respective communities.

A simple definition of what makes a good leader is nearly impossible to address as stated by Williams and Lindsey (2011). All leaders are different in many ways and similar in others. Leadership is also highly dependent upon the issue at the time. A leader must possess a

multitude of different skills to be successful, as these differing skills will play into various situations.

According to Hustedde and Woodward (1996), the idea of a leader at the top of the hierarchy of an organization, making authoritarian decisions for the entire group is not what effective leadership is. In this definition of leadership, the followers of the leader are passive and lack any vision. Avant and Copeland (2013), stated that leadership is a process in which an individual influences a group to achieve a shared goal. It is transactional in that occurs between the leaders and the followers. The leader affects and is affected by the other individuals that share the same purpose.

The literature points to styles of leadership that includes but is not limited to transformational leadership, participatory leadership, and servant leadership according to Williams and Lindsay (2011). In these, leadership is broadly defined as the interaction between members of an organization and the leaders acting as change agents and whose actions affect other people's actions more than other people's actions affect them. Leadership occurs when one group member motivates or adds to the competencies of an organization. Avant and Copeland (2013) stated that these types of leadership theories create a circumstance in which individuals feel included. Since group members are included in the process, their satisfaction increases along with the motivation to achieve the intended goal.

2.1.2 Agricultural Leadership Programs

Community development and leadership is a critical issue facing the United States especially in rural areas, but as many of these regions continue to face declining economies, there is a lack of leadership capacity to address the various issues. To address social capital and leadership

development deficiencies various public sector groups including the land-grant institutions and organizations such as Farm Bureau have supported the development and at times taken the lead in agricultural leadership programs (Kelsey and Wall, 2003).

According to Horner (1984), an example of this was in Nebraska where it lost one-half of its food producers in a generation. While production skills were improved, leadership development went practically ignored. Few agriculturalists were expected to become effective leaders. The result was that Extension educators were challenged to do something about the gap in public policy education for leaders of agriculture. The result was the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council Inc. was created to implement a leadership-training program

Kaufman and Carter (2005) noted that most of the agricultural leadership programs that are in existence today have based their program on the one that started at Michigan State University under the Kellogg Farmer Study Program. The objective of the early program was to develop skills through the social sciences that were considered essential to solving problems in not only the agricultural community but also that of the rural communities.

Kaufman and Carter (2005) stated that in an analysis of agricultural leadership programs using the Kellogg Farmer Study Program model it found that they share common educational objectives. Objectives included developing participant's ability to analyze public issues objectively and to develop an understanding of the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of public issues. The programs also aimed to increase participant's ability to solve problems by improving participation skills in diverse groups and increase understanding of issues at all levels of government including internationally. Diem and Nikola (2005) also found in their study that agricultural leadership programs promote skills that can be used to improve participant's

business, public, and personal lives. The objective is to enhance not only their involvement in agricultural organizations but also community and civic organizations.

Of the nearly 40 different agricultural leadership programs across the country, a review of the literature finds that most of them have similar overall objectives. According to Kelsey and Wall (2003), Oklahoma State University founded their leadership program in the early 1980's with the idea of teaching adults involved with agriculture leadership skills to impact policy at all levels of government. The Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program's objective as stated by Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Campbell (1996) is to increase knowledge of public affairs and skills through enhanced capacities to deal with public policy issues. The New Jersey Agricultural Leadership Development Program focuses on members of agriculture-related professions to improve business skills, network, and develop effective communication skills both oral and written according to Diem and Nikola (2005).

Agricultural leadership programs are seen as vital according to Kaufman and Carter (2005) because they help to ensure a ready supply of effective leaders. Leadership development programming is not only beneficial for the individual but has also been found to benefit the community in which the participants live as stated by Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016). One of the main advantages is that communities benefitted from a larger pool of leaders that were concerned about the community and could bring their resources and expertise together.

Wall, Pettibone, and Kelsey (2005) stated that by teaching leadership skills, communication skills, and creating networks these programs are helping participants become more successful leaders than they were before the program. Many of these programs receive praise for their ability to provide a rich space for networking. One of the major questions is do

these programs with their networking help to develop leaders and contribute to the community according to Kaufman and Carter (2005) and Kelsey and Wall (2003).

2.1.3 Perceived Outcomes

Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (2000) evaluated several leadership programs and most listed many favorable outcomes from their participants. Participants indicated that they had an increased sense of social, civic, and political awareness after completing their respective leadership programs. Many also perceived improvements in their commitment to service, communication skills, social responsibility and civic efficacy. Black and Earnest (2009) indicated that participants in the agricultural leadership program they examined gained knowledge of self, improved in business skills, and became more active in their community.

Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Campbell (1996) found that knowledge gained by participants in the understanding public issues, relationships at the local, state, and national level, along with public affairs was positively associated with participation in an agricultural leadership program. Participants also gained knowledge of themselves and cultural differences. Whent and Lensing (1992) and Black and Earnest (2009) also found that participants identified an increase in awareness of larger societal issues including cultural issues. Black, Metzler, and Waldrum (2006) also cited an increase in cultural awareness of participants. Participants believed that the increased awareness positively affected their ability to bring diverse groups together to address issues.

Broadening of perspectives and unique needs as they pertained to others were cited as significant changes that Black, Metzler, and Waldrum (2006) found in their participants. This openness led to a willingness to look beyond themselves and see a broader picture and an

increased ability to bring diverse groups together for consensus building. Black and Earnest (2009) also found an improved understanding of the “big picture” and a greater appreciation of different leadership styles. Kelsey and Wall (2003) found an increase in understanding their strengths and weaknesses and ability to respect a variety of different leadership styles.

Kelsey and Wall (2003) found that participants increased their knowledge of agricultural issues, legislative processes, and economic development. They also concluded that there was an increase in the general awareness of the needs of communities along with an increase in how to access governmental infrastructure and support systems to address those needs. Whent and Lensing (1992) found increased interaction with government officials and agricultural leaders. Diem and Nikola (2005) also found that participants cited the most knowledge gained in relationships between various agricultural related organizations, lobbying procedures, economic and social issues.

Daugherty and Williams (1997), Whent and Lensing (1992), and Diem and Nikola (2005) found that networking was one of the major benefits of agricultural leadership programs. Black and Earnest (2009) cited that participants stated that they had a better ability to network which helped them with their business. The improved ability to effectively network benefitted participants due to the support of other business professionals. Black, Metzler, and Waldrum (2006) stated that this networking with other business professional led their study group to have greater confidence in developing business relationships.

Participants in the study done by Kelsey and Wall (2003) cited networking as the most important aspect of the program. Participants stated that exposure to different individuals and organizations put participants in contact with people that could help them with their community improvement efforts. Kaufman and Carter (2005) also found that increased contacts and

networking opportunities were not only outstanding features but also resulted in more involvement in community organizations after the program.

Several studies including Kaufman and Carter (2005) and Diem and Nikola (2005) also reported an increase in self-confidence. Daugherty and Williams (1997) found that between the educational materials and networking their participants were more confident to plan and implement change. Black, Metzler, and Waldrum (2006) found participants gained confidence and self-esteem in part from making multiple presentations and part from the educational experiences from workshops and seminars.

Confidence, in general, has been cited by several studies, but confidence in public speaking has also been a common theme. Apaliyah and Martin (2013) in their study mentioned an improvement in communication skills especially in regards to public speaking. When asked about the most valuable benefits of the agricultural leadership programs Diem and Nickola (2005) found confidence in public speaking ranked at the top. Black and Earnest (2009) also found that their participants benefitted from an increase in communication skills including public speaking.

Black and Earnest (2009) cited a higher awareness of the value of participant's time. Several of their participants mentioned that they now choose where to get involved and that they have learned to say no. Black, Metzler, and Waldrum (2006) indicated that some participants did decrease their involvement with multiple organizations to increase their effectiveness in fewer organizations. Kelsey and Wall (2003) cited that participants allowed others to take on leadership roles, which were found to be a benefit due to improved time management

Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016) found in their study of several agricultural leadership programs that the majority of the participants found the programs to be to their satisfaction or in

many instances felt very satisfied towards the programs. Diem and Nickola (2005) found in their study that the agricultural leadership program not only met but also exceeded expectations. They also found that most participants rated the program as a worthwhile endeavor. Black and Earnest (2007) found that the majority of their respondents indicated that their agricultural leadership program should continue.

2.1.4 Recommendations for Effective Programs

Kelsey and Wall (2003) found that participants acknowledged a greater awareness of issues facing the agricultural industry and their communities but that most of the graduates were not making efforts to produce community changes or to use their networks for community improvement. One suggestion made was that the programs should focus on improving skills as opposed to simply awareness. Kaufman and Carter (2005) also stated that agricultural leadership programs should go beyond awareness and engage participants in a way that allows them to identify issues, develop solutions, and utilize that solution to address the issues.

Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (2000) suggested including skill-building workshops that allow participants to discuss various topics including conflict resolution and networking. They also suggested that simulation should be included to encourage problem-solving. Within these simulations, participants should volunteer for leadership roles within the activity to practice being in a leadership role. Kelsey and Wall (2003) also suggested that the programs expand leadership to team activities and invite action by including community members to participate in seminars and workshops.

Awareness of issues affecting their respective communities and the agricultural industry is simply not enough. Kaufman and Carter (2005) stated that agricultural leadership programs

must also engage participants to develop plans of action during the programs. They went as far as to suggest that internships or practicums be required for participants to practice leadership skills. Kelsey and Wall (2003) have also suggested that projects should be a component of the programs so that participants can create and implement a plan for community development utilizing the skills that they have learned.

A couple of unexpected issues surfaced in regards to family matters. Black, Metzler, and Waldrum (2006) cited that time away from family, and home were the most common negatives mentioned in regards to the agricultural leadership programs. Some of the participants specifically mentioned issues with their spouses. Black and Earnest (2009) confirmed this finding as some of their participants indicated that relationships with their spouses, family, or farm worsened from involvement with the program.

Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (2000) found that one of the primary characteristics of the best programs that they examined was a clear evaluation plan. These evaluation plans, which are an ongoing process, disseminated results to all of its stakeholders. Results of the evaluations were also utilized to revise and help to strengthen certain aspects of the program's curriculum.

2.1.5 Lack of Evaluations

As a result of the work of Russon and Reinelt (2004), they found that there is both a desire and need to evaluate the outcomes and greater impact of leadership programs. This type of data is naturally useful for demonstrating the effectiveness of the leadership programs to all of the various stakeholders. Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016), also stated that agricultural leadership program directors would also benefit from having a benchmark of results to base future program changes and improvements.

Most of the leadership programs do assess outcomes to some degree. Fewer assess outcomes and impact at the community level as well. Kelsey and Wall (2003) cited that critics of agricultural leadership programs claim that the results of the programs are not well defined and furthermore are not adequately evaluated. Kaufman and Rudd (2006) also found that if evaluations occur there is not comprehensive publication of the results or impacts on the individual or the community.

Russon and Reinelt (2004) and Black and Earnest (2007) also found that although leadership programs desire to report outcomes and impact which are mid to long-term they are forced to focus on immediate results which are short-term. One of the major issues might be a lack of funding to conduct long-term evaluations or knowledge in how to create and implement such evaluations. Another more complicated issue according to Black and Earnest (2007) is creating an accurate method to measure a leadership programs outcomes and impacts.

According to Russon and Reinelt (2004), there is an over-reliance on data that is collected from the participants in the agricultural leadership programs. Participants are the primary source of data and pose bias issues due to the self-reported information. Others to consider when evaluating are mentors, facilitators, community leaders, program-generated data, publications, or even funds that were successfully acquired.

Diem and Nikola (2005) stated that to measure the long-term impacts of agricultural leadership programs and if only concentrating on the participants than consideration needs to be given to their actions regarding community and leadership involvement. Russon and Reinelt (2004) agreed in that individuals as the measure of evaluation would benefit by a long-term longitudinal evaluation to better document the impact of agricultural leadership programs. According to Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Cambell (1996), it is beneficial to evaluate participants

over an extended period. Time would bring out the differences in leadership participation between participants with different status levels due to access and opportunity along with other possible measurable factors.

The ability to evaluate and communicate the outcomes and impacts from the agricultural leadership development programs is critical for their continued financial support according to Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016). Evaluation is particularly important for programs that are related to Cooperative Extension, as evaluation should be a part of the program process. According to Black and Earnest (2007), these types of programs must prove that they are relevant and are addressing the various needs of their stakeholders.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The adult learning theory formulated by Boshier (1971) and tested by his Education Participation Scale (EPS) provides the theoretical basis for this study. Boshier based his theory and the EPS scale off of work done through Houle's typology. According to Boshier and Collins (1985) and Houle (1962), Houle's typology addressed "motivational orientation" for adult participation in learning activities. Houle (1962) broke down what he called "adult learners" into three sub-groups: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented.

Boshier and Collins (1985) related that these were not pure types and at times the different types of adult learners overlapped. Although individuals could demonstrate all three types of the typologies at various times, one typology was dominant. In most cases, the researcher of this study believes that the majority of the participants in the RULE program would be considered goal-oriented adult learners. According to Boshier (1971) and Boshier and Collins

(1985), goal-oriented adult learners identify a need or interest, and they satisfy it by taking an educational course or a series of educational workshops.

Boshier (1991) stated that there are seven factors as to why adult learners participate in educational activities:

1. Communication Improvement both verbally and written.
2. Social Contact consisting of meeting friends and colleagues.
3. Education Preparation to remedy past deficiencies and prepare for the future.
4. Professional Advancement and the desire to improve status.
5. Family Togetherness by learning how to improve relationships.
6. Social Stimulation by escaping loneliness or boredom
7. Cognitive Interest either by seeking knowledge or satisfying an inquiring mind.

According to Boshier (1971), it would be commonplace to label adult learners as “motivated.” Motivation is provided by the desire to either grow or because a deficiency has been identified. In the case of the goal-oriented adult learner, the desire is to improve and elevate to a higher level. Goal-oriented adult learners according to Boshier (1971) and Boshier (1991) have an appetite for growth and seek out educational activities that will aid them in either growing personally or professionally. Boshier and Collins (1985) stated that motivated adult learners will continue with educational pursuits even after the initial need or growth is realized.

2.2.1 Conceptual Model

A conceptual model (Figure 4) was created by this researcher to illustrate the motivation for learning that occurs in an agricultural leadership program such as the RULE program. Utilizing the adult learning theory proposed by Boshier (1971) that was influenced by Houle (1962) and

further refined by Boshier (1991) adult learners are motivated to learn by differing factors and pursue learning either to address a perceived deficiency or to grow either personally or professionally.

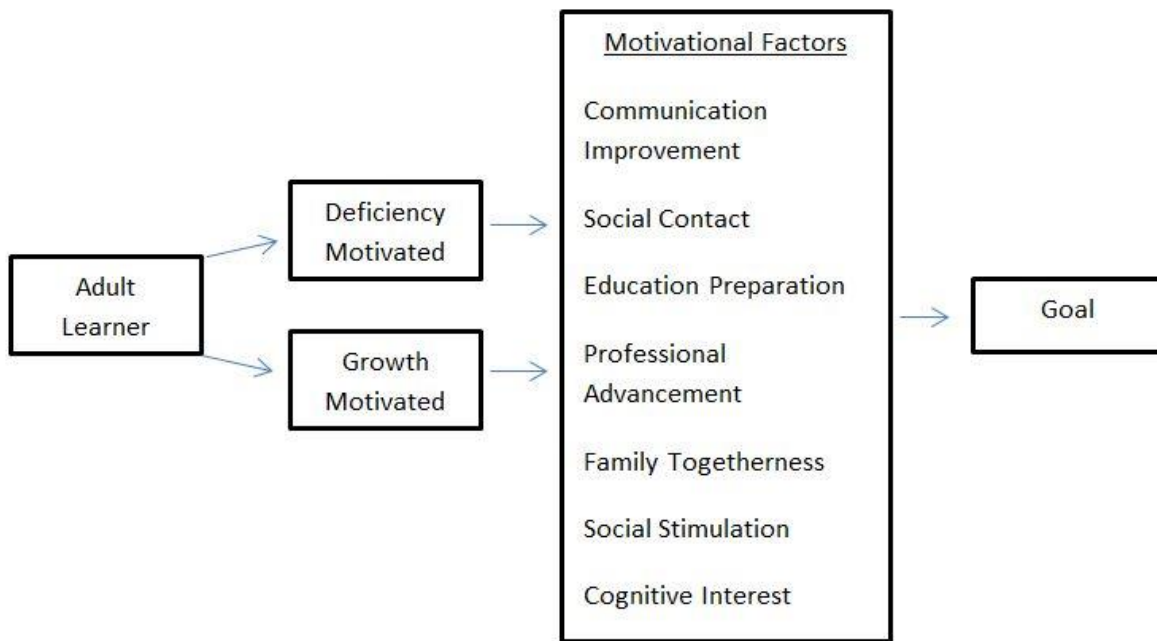


Figure 2.1: Conceptual model adapted from Adult Learning Theory (Boshier, 1991).

2.3 SUMMARY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to understand the purpose of agricultural leadership programs, it was important first to define the concept of leadership broadly. Agricultural leadership development programs have a long history in this country and internationally. Over the course of this history, the overall mission of the programs has remained the same, but many have grown to address urban areas and other segments of society not just those with an agricultural background. Evaluations of

these programs have occurred sporadically yielding positive outcomes and recommendations for improvement.

The three major questions that guided this study were developed by consulting the literature that specializes in practitioner research including McEwan and McEwan (2003) and Menter et. al (2011). Practitioner research literature was also utilized to inform the semi-structured interview and Qualtrics survey design. Literature related to the evaluation of agricultural leadership programs such as Carter and Rudd (2000), Wall, Pettibone, and Kelsey (2005), and Whent and Leising (1992) were also consulted to not only assess what these studies found but also to review their respective research designs and protocols. The theoretical framework and conceptual model based off of Boshier (1971), Boshier and Collins (1985), and further refined by Boshier (1991) also provided a basis for inquiring about the “adult learners” and their motivation to grow through learning by attending an agricultural leadership program such as RULE.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE

3.1 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to assess the experiences of alumni of the RULE program. The objective of this study was to determine what alumni of the RULE program perceived they gained from participating in the program and determine what alumni of the RULE program valued about their experience. This study also provided an opportunity for RULE program alumni to suggest programmatic improvements regarding curriculum and activities for the RULE program.

This study utilized both a qualitative method and a quantitative method to triangulate the data. A semi-structured interview instrument of six questions with four secondary questions was designed to provide an in-depth assessment of the RULE program. An electronic survey instrument of 25 questions was also created to get a broader understanding of the RULE program through the Qualtrics system as is required by the University of Pittsburgh.

According to Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, and Lowden (2011) by combining the semi-structured interview and survey approaches it increases the trustworthiness and validation of the study findings. The triangulation of sources allowed for data triangulation and methodological triangulation. The purpose of this according to Yin (2014) is to collect data from multiple sources with the objective of supporting the same finding.

This study was guided by the adult learning theory formulated by Boshier (1971) and further refined by Boshier (1991). In order to provide an accurate assessment of the RULE program, the participants in this study were graduates of the RULE program from the last 15 years and not current fellows. The following three inquiry questions provided the basis for the qualitative and quantitative questions:

1. What did alumni of RULE perceive they gained from participation in the program?
2. What aspects of the RULE program experience did alumni find to be the most valuable?
3. What would alumni of RULE suggest to improve the program?

3.2 RESEARCH SETTING

PSU Homepage (2016) stated that The Pennsylvania State University is the Commonwealth's sole land-grant university. The land-grant designation involves a tri-fold mission of teaching, research, and public service. In 1855, the university was founded as one of the countries' first colleges of agricultural science. With the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862, the state legislature designated The Pennsylvania State University as the land-grant institution in Pennsylvania. The passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 formally established Cooperative Extension across the United States. In Pennsylvania, that system still exists with an office in all 67 counties of the Commonwealth according to the College of Agricultural Sciences (2016).

The RULE program is based on the State College, PA campus of The Pennsylvania State University within the College of Agricultural Sciences and administered by Penn State Extension. According to Tara Homan (personal communication, October 26, 2016), almost all of the programming for the RULE program does not take place at State College, PA. The

program consists of 10 Study Institutes that are spread over an 18-month period and located throughout Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.

J.D. Dunbar stated (personal communication, October 26, 2016) that the different locations allow participants the opportunity to experience varying aspects of agriculture, industry, and the political process that most individuals in Pennsylvania are unable to experience or even access. Another reason for utilizing different location is that the RULE program wants to bring participants to places that they might never have been. If they happened to have been to the various locations, the intent is that participants will experience them differently.

According to Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2016a), the RULE program admits 20 to 30 participants into each of its classes and has been in operating since 1985. As of 2016, the RULE program is in the middle of its sixteenth class. Rural-Urban Leadership Program (2010) stated that over 600 graduates had completed the RULE program from all aspects of life across Pennsylvania.

Part of the mission statement of The Pennsylvania State University according to PSU Homepage (2016) is, “as Pennsylvania’s land-grant university; we provide unparalleled access and public service to support the citizens of the Commonwealth.” The RULE program helps the greater university achieve its institutional mission. According to Rural-Urban Leadership program (2015b), the mission of the RULE program is to, “encourage and support leadership development for all segments of Pennsylvania.”

3.3 INQUIRY APPROACH

In an effort to assess the RULE program, a mixed methodology approach was utilized with both a qualitative and a quantitative method. By developing both a qualitative and a quantitative instrument, the study provided for a triangulation of data and methods. Another consideration is that the semi-structured interviews allowed for greater depth in collecting electronic survey data based on the themes found in the semi-structured interviews. Yin (2014) stated that by utilizing mixed methodologies, the approach allows the researcher to obtain a deeper range of data than can be accomplished by using a single method.

Qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to delve deeper into the data than quantitative methods permit. Qualitative methods such as interviews allow the researcher to ask multiple questions in regards to a particular intervention according to McEwan and McEwan (2003). The major objective of the semi-structured interviews was to gather more in-depth data than the electronic survey allowed. Another objective was to identify specific issues that interviewees pinpointed in order to inform the electronic survey for RULE program improvement.

Quantitative research methods such as electronic surveys allow the researchers to take a “snap-shot” in regards to their research questions in an efficient manner according to Menter, et. al (2011). Quantitative methods also allow for a broader view by involving more participants in the study in a more efficient manner than methods used to garner qualitative data. Collecting the data through an electronic survey program such as Qualtrics allowed for easier data collection and interpretation.

3.3.1 Data Collection

Conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with graduates of the RULE program fulfilled the qualitative research design aspect of this study. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to engage in conversation with the study participants. According to Metner, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, and Lowden (2011), this allowed for some degree of flexibility but still enabled the researcher to address the research questions and interview questions.

The researcher interviewed ten RULE program alumni. The semi-structured interviews centered on six interview questions and four secondary questions that were directly related to the three inquiry questions of the study. By using this approach, this allowed the researcher to ascertain information directly associated with the investigator protocol and to ask the “how” and “why” questions according to Yin (2014). The interview questions allowed for a greater understanding of the experiences that the participants had in the RULE program. The questions also allowed the participants to convey what they perceived they had gained from participating in the RULE program and what they would suggest for programmatic improvement.

The semi-structured interviews took place in January of 2017 with the researcher attempting to do one or two a week in a face-to-face format and in one instance via Zoom. The alumni selected for the interview were first contacted via email explaining the objectives of the study and asked for their participation. Interviewees were chosen based on the input of RULE program staff, geographic considerations of the researcher, and their community or professional leadership capacity. The identity of the interview subjects was kept confidential by the researcher. Information such as the interviewee's name or any other identifiers like employment or the community that they reside for the purpose of the interview was not included in the results portion of the study.

Ideally, the researcher would have liked only to pursue alumni that were available in southwestern Pennsylvania within a relatively short driving distance of the researcher. Recognizing that geographic diversity would allow for a better a sample of RULE alumni the geographic area was expanded to include all of Pennsylvania. After the alumni had agreed to participate in the interview, the researcher contacted the alumni via the telephone to set up the logistics of the meeting. Each interview took no longer than one hour to complete. Each of the interviewees had the option to determine the location of the meeting.

The quantitative component of this research study consisted of an electronic survey utilizing the Qualtrics program. The survey consisted of 25 questions of which 21 were multiple-choice questions; one was a ranking question, and three were open-ended questions. Of the 25 questions 20 were directly related to program assessment, four described the demographics of the participants, and one question addressed payment of the participant's investment in the RULE program.

Selection and construction of the semi-structured interview and survey questions was based on literature related to practitioner research including McEwan and McEwan (2003) and Menter et. al (2011). These sources provided direction in constructing relevant research questions that would allow for participant elaboration, especially for the semi-structured interviews. The practitioner literature also provided guidance for the design of the electronic survey instrument including scales and narrowing down relevant demographic information for the purpose of analyzing aggregate data.

The literature review which consisted of peer-reviewed journals and published dissertations that were related to the topic of evaluating agricultural leadership programs were also consulted in creating the overall research design. Sources such as Carter and Rudd (2000),

Wall, Pettibone, and Kelsey (2005), and Whent and Leising (1992) were reviewed to not only assess what these studies found about program outcomes but also to review their respective research designs and protocols. Based on the review of the literature the then-post design was chosen in order to help control for overestimation and response-shift bias.

Consideration was also given to the interests of the RULE program staff and current RULE fellows that were consulted during small-group projects. The interests of the researcher as a current RULE fellow also contributed to the selection of the final questions. The researcher was provided with a unique research opportunity as he was currently enrolled in the program and was able to take a sort of “ethnographic” approach to the study.

Survey preparation included involvement of RULE XVI class members who volunteered to test the survey instrument. The testers found the questionnaire should take less than 10 minutes to complete and in most instances approximately seven minutes. Menter, et al. (2011) provided survey construction tips such as designing the survey to be completed either on a computer or a mobile device in a relatively short period to avoid survey “drop-off.”

Alumni for the survey were initially contacted through an email from the RULE program staff explaining the objectives of the study and asking for their participation. The researcher then contacted alumni via email further explaining the study with the Qualtrics electronic survey link. The researcher sent out a final email communication approximately a week later if the threshold reminding the sample population to complete the questionnaire. The identity of those that participated in the survey is unknown to the researcher due to the anonymous link that was generated through the Qualtrics system.

3.3.2 Sample and Data Sources

The participants in this study were solicited to participate voluntarily. All of the participants were over the age of 18 and were alumni of the RULE program. The subject population was composed of RULE program alumni that have completed the program in the last 15 years. Menter et. al (2011) described this as a purposive sample as there was no randomization or clustering. The RULE program alumni database provided and validated by the RULE program staff provided participant contact information including RULE class, occupation at the time of enrollment, address, telephone number, and email address.

The database contained contact information for over 600 alumni with a total of a little over 350 emails that alumni in the RULE program provided when they were enrolled. The sample did not include all of these contacts only participants from RULE VII to RULE XV. Using RULE VII through RULE XV allowed for an initial sample size of approximately 210 individuals. After examining the list, there were 196 email contacts.

At the end of the survey and before beginning the semi-structured interview, participants were asked to provide basic demographic information. This information included gender/sex, age at the time of program enrollment, yearly personal income, and the highest level of school. How participants paid for their personal investment in the RULE program constituted the final question of the survey. The review of the literature revealed that considering demographic information in the data analysis will reveal trends based on data such as income, gender, and level of education.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

The inquiry approach for this research project was to provide an assessment in order to learn what participants perceive they gained from the RULE program and to determine what they would improve about the RULE program. The approach included both a quantitative instrument and a qualitative instrument that according to McEwan and McEwan (2003) are complementary and both are employed to make inferences on the data. An electronic survey of 25 questions was administered through Qualtrics to collect quantitative data, and a semi-structured interview of six guiding questions and four secondary questions was utilized to collect qualitative data. Each of the survey and interview questions was related back to one of the three inquiry questions that were driving the assessment study of the RULE program.

The survey was implemented through the Qualtrics system, which is fortunate because Qualtrics was able to secure the data and also provide simple reports and charts. The other option was to export the data from the Qualtrics system to Excel. The data analysis was relatively straightforward as this was a small study. Frequency distribution and percentages were used to present the majority of the findings. Menter et. al (2011) stated that small-scale research generally does not need to go beyond frequencies and percentages to present findings

Descriptive statistics including mean, median, and mode could prove useful especially for nominal data according to Tananis, Trahan, Fertman, and Capello (2016). Disaggregation and regression analysis also were a part of the study especially when it came to the demographic aspects of the survey. Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Campbell (1996) found that demographic characteristics such as gender, age at the time of enrollment, education, and income effect perceived outcomes.

Analysis of the qualitative data was not as straightforward. The six interview questions were based on the three inquiry questions that guided this study. Recording of the interviews occurred utilizing a recording app on the researcher's iPhone to avoid error on the part of the research as this was suggested by Yin (2014) for later transcription. Notes were also taken on a notes sheet created by the researchers based on the six questions to help the researcher discover themes as the interview progressed.

The interviews were sorted and coded based on the three inquiry questions. Menter et. al (2011) suggested once the thematic framework is decided the next step is to index the data. The researcher combed the data looking for reoccurring patterns and concepts. Relevant quotes were also highlighted. Once indexing was completed, the researcher then placed the data in the appropriate thematic groupings.

Tables, charts, and diagrams were used to summarize the study findings. Menter et. al (2011) and Tananis et. al (2016) stated that tables and charts were adequate for most of the studies undertaken by practitioners. The quantitative information was analyzed through Qualtrics in order create the visuals needed to interpret the data quickly. The qualitative data was coded thematically and then put together in a spreadsheet and then matched with the relevant quantitative results for the final analysis and summary.

There are some perceived weaknesses in this study. The first of which is there is no control group and the sample is not randomized. There are also no pre-posttest type questions. It would have been impossible for the researcher in this period of time to have pre-tested alumni of the RULE program. Through a review of the literature, the researcher also decided not to include those types of questions on the survey. There is also no baseline data as this study was merely a "snapshot" as opposed to a longitudinal study.

3.4 RESEARCHER'S REFLEXIVITY

Three components of my identity were especially relevant for this study. The first of which is that I am originally from a rural environment in northwestern Pennsylvania that is experiencing a population decline and with that a leadership decline. As a young professional educator, I often found myself in leadership roles within either the school district or the community in which I lived. At the time, I did not know of any leadership programs that could have helped my colleagues and myself develop as community leaders.

The second component to consider is that I am currently enrolled in RULE XVI. At this point, I have nearly completed the RULE program. My participation in the RULE program will end a couple of weeks after I defend this dissertation. I do believe that the program is effective and I will find some positive results from my study. Participants in the study could have skewed their responses since they will know that I am a current class member.

I have also been offered the opportunity to communicate my research as is required for the Demonstration of Scholarly Practice at the last Study Institute of RULE XVI. This last Study Institute will take place at State College, PA and will include the commencement ceremony. Since this will be part of the commencement ceremony weekend for the RULE XVI, there will be some of the RULE program's primary stakeholders present.

The last component of my identity that is relevant to this study is that I am a Penn State Extension employee. Currently, I serve as a District Director for Washington, Greene, and Fayette counties. This position is considered a mid-level management position within the Extension organization. My occupation could have also skewed the participant's responses or determined whether they even chose to respond to the study. The Associate Director of Extension, a RULE program alumnus also took an interest in this research study and its results as

well. Since I am an Extension employee, I will also endeavor to have my work published in either the Journal of Extension (JOE) or the Journal of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA). Both of which are refereed journals related to the work of the Cooperative Extension System.

3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD

Agricultural leadership programs exist across the country and internationally. These programs have graduated thousands since their inception decades ago. This study only addressed one of those programs, the RULE program. The RULE program itself has graduated over 600 alumni since the program started. This study's initial sample only included living participants from the last 15 years totaling 198 alumni. Additionally, only alumni with working email addresses received the opportunity to take part in the study. The goal of this study was to have 30 to 40 of the electronic surveys returned and to interview ten alumni. This study was also only able to provide a "snap-shot" of alumni as opposed to a longitudinal study that could ascertain alumni involvement in leadership roles and its effect on their communities.

The survey was developed based on the current literature, interests of the RULE program staff, and interests of the researcher. Therefore, another limitation relates to the viability of the survey. The researcher's advisor and the Chief Executive Officer of the RULE program did approve the survey instrument. Additionally, a pilot test was done with RULE XVI classmates to determine the reliability of the instrument and to determine the average length of time it would take to complete the questionnaire.

The researcher also assumed that participants of the study provided accurate responses, but in some instances, the participants were involved in the program 10 or 15 years ago. This length of time could have distorted their memory of the RULE program. According to Menter et. al., (2011) participant recall is a disadvantage of questionnaires especially when they are anonymous without an opportunity to follow up.

Interviews are useful to dig deeper into an assessment by understanding individual experiences, but they are costly according to McEwan and McEwan (2003). The interviews were costly regarding mainly time. Each interview might have only taken an hour but between travel time, the actual interview, transcribing, coding, and analyzing the data hours were spent on each interview. Interviews are also a social interaction according to Menter et. al., (2011) which require skill to stay on task and not lead the interviewee or exhibit personal bias.

Bias on the part of the participants and the researcher was also a concern. The researcher is a RULE XVI class member and an employee of Penn State Extension. Participants may have been inclined not to give accurate information because the researcher was closely related to the RULE program. As a current class member, an employee of Penn State Extension, and a proponent of adult leadership development programs the researcher also admits that he has a vested interest in the continued success of this program. The researcher made every effort to remain unbiased and maintain objectivity

3.6 SUMMARY

To evaluate the RULE program an agricultural leadership development a mixed methodology approach was utilized. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data. An

electronic survey was conducted to gather quantitative data. The three inquiry questions guided the questions for both methods. These questions were based on the literature review, theoretical approach, and conceptual model. These questions addressed what alumni perceived they gained from participating in the program, what they valued about the program, and what they would recommend for program improvement.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 FINDINGS

The results of the semi-structured interviews and the Qualtrics survey are presented in this chapter. The total population for this study was 208 alumni from RULE classes RULE VII thru RULE XV. Of the 208 alumni, 196 were accessible electronically via email. Only 12 of the alumni were not accessible either because valid emails were not available or they had recently passed away. Of the 196 available alumni, 10 were interviewed, and 74 completed the Qualtrics survey for a response rate of 38%. All of the replies were used for the analyses required by the research questions in this study.

4.2 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

4.2.1 Participant Recruitment

The interviewees for the semi-structured interviews were selected based on their leadership positions either related to their profession or their active leadership roles in community organizations. Most of the interviewees held active leadership roles in both their professions and

their communities. A list of the interviewees along with a short biography is found below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Interviewee List of RULE Alumni with Short Biographies

Interview	Short Biography
Interviewee #1	A resident of central PA who currently serves in a senior leadership capacity for Penn State University. Previously, served in a leadership capacity for a school district and a municipal planning commission in southeastern PA.
Interviewee #2	A resident of central PA who serves as the Executive Director of a Festival of the Arts. Currently, volunteers with numerous community organizations including the Pennsylvania Rural Arts Alliance and municipal boards dealing with historic preservation and planning.
Interviewee #3	A resident of central PA who currently serves as an administrator for Penn State University. Previously, served in a management capacity for the hospitality industry.
Interviewee #4	A resident of northwestern PA who currently acts as a city manager. Previously, served as an attorney for a county in the northwest PA and a federal agency.
Interviewee #5	A resident of northeastern PA who currently serves as Executive Director for a state agency. Previously, served as a mayor of a small city in PA and as a member of the PA Municipal League.
Interviewee #6	A resident of southeastern PA who previously served as a county official and before that as a manager of an agri-business. Currently, volunteers for the International Alumni Conference (ILAC) Advisory Group and the local Farm Bureau.
Interviewee #7	A resident of southeastern PA who currently serves as a Business Development Officer for a credit agency. Serves in a leadership capacity for several organizations including the county planning commission and local school board

Table 4.1 continued; Interviewee List of RULE Alumni with Short Biographies (continued)

Interviewee #8	A resident of southeastern PA who currently acts as a Chief of Staff for a Pennsylvania senator at the state level. Previously served as a Director of Public Affairs for a non-profit.
Interviewee #9	A resident of southeastern PA who currently acts as a Director of Operations for Development of a major medical center. Previously served as a Fellow at the Center for Rural PA.
Interviewee #10	A resident of northwestern PA who currently acts as an administrator for a medium-sized school district. Volunteers throughout the community including serving on the local zoning board and a local non-profit that provides services for those diagnosed with MH/MR.

Utilizing the RULE alumni list which provided job descriptions and community roles by the RULE program staff this researcher chose a list of 10 RULE alumni that he felt held an active leadership role(s). This researcher then consulted with the RULE program staff and was provided with another list of an additional 10 RULE alumni that they also felt held active leadership roles. To include a distribution of RULE classes and Pennsylvania geography, this researcher prioritized the 20 RULE alumni and began the process of contacting them.

Out of the established list of the 20 RULE alumni this researcher successfully made contact with 14 of them via email. The last six on the list were never reached because after making contact with the initial 14 this researcher had successfully met the threshold of 10 interviewees. Of the 14 that were contacted, one was not interested in participating in this study; one was interested but couldn't find the time, one could not participate in person or via Zoom which is a Web-based video conferencing tool, and one was interested but never returned my phone call. Of the remaining ten, nine agreed to meet in person, and one decided to meet via Zoom.

The interviewees were all RULE alumni from classes between RULE VII and RULE XV but not all of the classes. The distribution of the interviewees based on RULE class is found below in Table 4.2. This researcher endeavored to attempt to reach out to possible interviewees that participated throughout the duration of this study not just recently or at the beginning.

Table 4.2: Distribution of RULE Class Interviewee Sample

RULE Class	# of Interviewees
RULE VII	3
RULE VIII	1
RULE XII	1
RULE XIII	2
RULE XIV	2
RULE XV	1
TOTAL	10

Interviewees also represented a cross-section of Pennsylvania as they came from all over the state. Interviews also took place all over the state in various types of locations. Two of the interviews took place on the campus of The Pennsylvania State University at State College, PA. Two interviews took place at the Capitol Building in Harrisburg, PA. Two interviews took place at the offices of the interviewees. Two other interviews occurred in public spaces, one at a Starbucks and one at a Panera. One interview took place in a backroom at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, PA. The last interview took place over Zoom with the interviewee and the interviewer both at their respective offices.

4.3 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The electronic survey created through the Qualtrics system relied on the alumni email database provided by RULE program staff. The database that was provided had a total of 198 emails of RULE alumni from RULE VII to RULE XV. The total sample including those alumni that did not have email addresses but not those that were recently deceased was 206 alumni. The alumni who did not have email addresses were not contacted for the purpose of this study.

The RULE program staff agreed that to cultivate the most responses for the survey that they would send out an initial email to the alumni database in order to provide legitimacy to the study. The email from the RULE program staff was followed a couple of hours later with an email from the researcher which provided the reasoning for the study and the Qualtrics survey link. Of the 198 email addresses that were furnished by the RULE program staff, only two came back as undeliverable for a total eligible sample size of 196.

The RULE program staff email and the first email from this researcher with the Qualtrics survey link was sent on January 26th, 2017 and garnered 37 completed surveys within 24 hrs. Over the next five days, another 20 surveys were completed totaling 57 respondents which is more than this researcher had expected to receive. On January 31st this researcher sent out another email reminding alumni of the study and its importance for RULE program assessment. The email also notified RULE alumni that Qualtrics survey link would be shut down on February 3rd, 2017.

When the survey link was finally closed down on February 3rd, 2017 out of an available sample of 196 a total of 74 RULE alumni from RULE VII to RULE XV had completed the survey which garnered a response rate of 38% for the electronic survey.

4.3.1 Participant Recruitment

The electronic survey created through the Qualtrics system relied on the alumni email database provided by RULE program staff for response. The database that was provided had a total of 198 emails of RULE alumni from RULE VII to RULE XV of which only two came back as undeliverable for a total accessible sample of 196. Out of the sample of 196, a total of 74 RULE alumni from RULE VII to RULE XV completed the survey. The survey consisted of 25 questions of which 21 are multiple-choice questions; one is a ranking question, and three are open-ended questions. Of the 25 questions 20 are directly related to program assessment, four describe the demographics of the participants, and one question addresses payment of the participant's investment in the RULE program. Presented in this section are results of the quantitative aspect of this study.

4.4 QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Nine face-to-face interviews and one web-based interview were held with alumni from various classes of the RULE program. Presented in this section are the alumni perception, opinions, and thoughts on the RULE program. The six questions and their four sub-questions are based on the three research questions that were initially posed by this researcher:

1. What did alumni of RULE perceive they gained from participation in the program?
2. What aspects of the RULE experience did alumni find to be the most valuable?
3. What would alumni of RULE suggest to improve the program?

4.4.1 Question 1: There are numerous leadership programs at the local, state, and national level. Why did you choose to invest in the RULE program?

Most of the alumni in this study had been recruited in some way to join the RULE program. Five of the interviewees had been approached by other alumni who were friends, family, or colleagues that had recently completed the RULE program. Two of the interviewees were recommended by their employers to take part in the RULE program. One interviewee was familiar with a similar program at another land-grant university and reached out to one of their colleagues who worked at Penn State but also just happened to be enrolled in the program. Two of the interviewees were initially not asked to join the RULE program but to be presenters at an Institute. After presenting at their respective Institutes, they inquired about joining the program. One interviewee stated that they, “were on the fence as to whether or not to participated but after going through the interview process, their interest was piqued.”

Interviewees shared various reasons as to why they were looking for a leadership program not necessarily the RULE program. One interviewee shared that they were at a “crossroads” in their personal life. Another interview also shared that they were at a “crossroads” in their life but instead at a professional level. Three of the interviewees stated that they were trying to find a way to get involved in their communities. Two interviewees figured that joining a leadership program would allow them to create a network that would benefit them both professionally and politically.

The RULE program was attractive to at least three of the interviewees because they were looking for a leadership program that went beyond the local or county level and had a state level component. Two interviewees indicated that they had participated in county level program but were looking for something at a deeper level. One of those who took part in a county level

program said that they, “were looking for a deeper dive and a more rigorous program.” One interviewee researched the program alumni and found that the program could help them network in relation to the state government. One interviewee said that they believed that, “the program had a higher caliber program and a better-connected alumni base than local level programs.” One of the interviewees stated that their attraction to the RULE program was based on its agricultural component.

4.4.2 Question 1B: When you initially signed up for the RULE program, did you expect to have more personal or professional growth?

Of the ten interviewees, four stated that they expected to grow personally as opposed to professionally. Two had a desire to become better public speakers. One wanted to learn about leadership and how to synthesize issues. Another interviewee hoped to learn how to open themselves up stating that they, “wanted to bring out myself which was difficult.” Another interviewee mentioned that they hoped they would receive some direction on a personal level about family and friends.

Four of the interviewees identified that they had joined the RULE program out of professional concerns. Three of these four specifically mentioned networking opportunities. One interviewee stated that they were hoping to determine a direction for their career. Another interviewee was rather candid in saying that there, “employer made me do it.”

Two of the interviewees indicated that they joined the RULE program out of concern for both personal and professional reasons. Both said that they were trying to get a handle on balancing their personal and professional lives and wanted to learn how to prioritize. One of the interviewees stated that “since their life was their work that their personal concerns were intertwined.”

4.4.3 Question 2: The agricultural component included within RULE is one of the aspects that makes it unique when compared to other leadership programs. Could you tell me what you learned about agriculture as a result of your participation in RULE?

Most of the interviewees felt that the agricultural component was beneficial in one way or another. Three of the interviewees felt that the exposure to the agricultural was not only beneficial but also educational. It was educational in the sense that the three of them had never actually been on a farm before enrolling in the RULE program. One interviewee stated, “Cows producing milk is taken for granted. You actually don’t realize the complicated process until you see it first-hand.” Another interviewee said, “Everyone learns about the value of agriculture in books, but when you see it, it’s different.” For one interviewee that grew up on a family farm but was no longer involved stated that the RULE program helped to reignite his interest in his roots. Another participant indicated that the agricultural side of the program provided, “a great motif for the program.” One interviewee who has been involved in agriculture his entire life felt that the cross-section of different experiences with agriculture allowed for a valuable learning experience.

Interviewees were also impressed with the broad array of agriculture in Pennsylvania. Four interviewees spoke of the program giving them an awareness of the varying sizes of agricultural programs in Pennsylvania. One interviewee stated that “the opportunity to interact with a large producer one day and then visit a small Amish farm the next day within miles of each other was amazing.” Another interviewee was surprised to learn about urban agriculture especially within Philadelphia and the fact that they have an agricultural school. Two interviewees commented that once they learned about agriculture they looked at it as a part of the community instead of something on the periphery and came away thinking about a bigger version of the community. Over half of the interviewees specifically mentioned agritourism and

the ingenuity that they saw in how farmers will take risks to try and make their businesses successful.

The political side of agricultural was also a theme found among interviewees. Two interviewees cited that agricultural policy regarding legislation at the state and federal level was much more complicated than they had previously thought. One of the interviewees who was an Extension educator as the time of enrollment stated, “that through the small group activities he was surprised about the various complexities involved with the Farm Bill at the federal level.” Another interviewee mentioned that they learned that agricultural policy was even bigger than the state or the federal level when it came to international trade policy when they were able to visit embassies in Washington, DC. Three other interviewees reported that they learned about the importance of advocacy and becoming a voice for agriculture and the importance agricultural organizations such as Farm Bureau for organizing those efforts.

Not all of the interviewees fully embraced the agricultural component found within the RULE program. One interviewee felt that the high concentration on agricultural was “off-putting” during the program but admitted that they did not do the proper research as to what to expect before starting the program. One interviewee stated that they wished that they hoped the RULE program would get more broad-based support in order spread their efforts to things like more economic and community development. Another interviewee stated that they did enjoy the agricultural component of the RULE program but did not feel that it contributed at all to their leadership development.

4.4.4 Question 3: RULE has many expected outcomes that are supposed to help its participants grow both personally and professionally. How have you applied what you have learned in RULE to your life both personally/professionally?

The most identified outcome that was notified by the interviewees had to deal with public speaking. Six of the 10 interviewees mentioned an improved level of self-confidence when it came to public speaking. Two interviewees specifically said that their self-esteem was improved due to their thinking process regarding what they needed to speak about and delivering that efficiently and effectively. One interviewee stated that the added confidence has led to more opportunities and connections because they are now sought out to speak at various functions. Another interviewee mentioned that they not only found they had greater confidence in speaking, but they believed that the program had helped them find their voice.

Public speaking wasn't the only communication skill that was emphasized by the interviewees. Improved listening skills was also another communication skill that was attributed to the RULE program by several interviewees. One of the interviewees stated, "I learned how to sit across the table and have a discussion without getting bent out of shape which is rare anymore." Two other interviewees mentioned that their ability to understand opposing viewpoints was also improved. One interviewee also stated that their comfort level with accepting constructive criticism increased which had helped them in their professional life.

Networking was identified as another major benefit of participating in the RULE program by four of the interviewees. One interviewee shared that, "It wasn't networking on a superficial level this was networking at a deeper level that resulted in life-long friendships." Another interviewee stated that in some instances the networks share a common interest and that they are proactive especially in the case of agriculture.

Other themes regarding personalities were also mentioned. Three interviewees identified conflict management skills as a beneficial outcome of the RULE program. Three interviews also indicated that understanding different personality types helped them to navigate both one on one and group interactions more effectively. Two interviewees stated that the program helped them to have a clearer vision of what was important and helped them to balance their personal and professional lives.

4.4.5 Question 3B: Did the RULE program act as a catalyst for personal or professional development? Could you provide examples?

Eight of the interviewees stated that the RULE program did act as a catalyst for personal or professional improvement. Two of the interviewees identified the benefits of participating in RULE program directly to their career promotions. One of these interviewees stated that “the RULE program taught me the ability to remain focused and see a project through to the end.” Two other interviewees credited the RULE program and what they learned from the program with giving them the confidence to move on to more prominent professional positions as well. Three interviewees also stated that the RULE program did increase their aspirations to not only excel professional but to also run for political office.

Two of the interviewees said the program did not act as a catalyst for personal or professional development. One of these interviewees indicated that many of the growth activities were too simple and that there should be different tiers RULE fellows. Another interviewee said that many of his fellows were focused on minor tasks as opposed to large-scale personal growth.

4.4.6 Question 4: RULE had 10 focus areas that make up its curriculum. Which of the areas did you find to be the most valuable and why?

Communication skills were the most mentioned of the curriculum areas that was found to be valuable. Of the ten interviewees, 6 mentioned communication skills as being a valuable part of the curriculum. Most stated that as an attribute of the RULE program that they gained confidence in their communication skills especially public speaking. One interviewee indicated that their meeting management skills had increased in that they could now “run a meeting efficiently” and “keeping a meeting moving.” Another interviewee also believed that the meeting management skills had helped them to manage their volunteers time better more effectively.

Five of the interviewees also cited the professional and personal development aspect of the RULE curriculum as being another valuable perspective. Three of the interviewees revealed that the Myers-Briggs personality profiles allowed them not only to understand where they came from but how others thought as well. One interviewee stated, “that it wasn’t always about me but my interactions with other personality types and how to work and massage those relationships.” Another interviewee mentioned that the exercises in leadership philosophies allowed them to synthesize what they did and why they did things a certain way. One issue that was identified by another interviewee is that they conducted themselves one way in their professional life and another in their working lives and they felt that to be enlightening.

Four of the interviewees also named governance as an important aspect of the RULE curriculum. Three of the four interviewees revealed that they never realized how approachable legislators at both the local and state level were. Two of the interviewees stated they were surprised to learn that lawmakers wanted to hear their concerns. One of the interviewees

believed that it was very beneficial to see, "...how government at the local, state, and federal government interacted with each other like part of a large puzzle." Another of the interviewees mentioned that the governance was particularly important for their career as they were able to start an active network.

Four of the interviewees also cited group projects and group process as being particularly beneficial. Two interviewees mentioned understanding interactions of group members in light of being knowledgeable about personality types through the Myers-Briggs. Three of the interviewees also indicated that the diversity of the groups in leadership styles and experience allowed for a greater understanding of how to navigate the group process. One interviewee stated, "I don't think that the group process necessarily developed my skill but that's how I came to the realization that I had it." One interviewee also mentioned that they learned a lot from classmates that might not have necessarily been a part of the curriculum but was still beneficial.

Interviewees also found other benefits to the curriculum that were not included in the curriculum chart. One interviewee stated that they "...had heard about those different areas but in the RULE program you were engaged, and this added another level of training that was hands-on and interactive." Another interviewee stated that they enjoyed how the Institutes moved around the state and they found it particularly beneficial to see all that Pennsylvania has to offer. Interestingly, enough only one of the interviewees directly mentioned that they felt that the leadership study aspect of the program was beneficial.

4.4.7 Question 4B: Out of the 10 focus areas of the RULE curriculum, what would you suggest for program modification?

Regarding curriculum modification, two interviewees stated that they would like to see a larger international component. One interviewee suggested a trip to even Canada and visiting areas

around the Great Lakes region. Both of the interviewees that suggested more significant emphasis on international studies also recognized the increased cost and realized that is probably not possible. Two other interviewees cited that they would like to see more emphasis put on healthcare as that is, “both an economic driver and a financial drainer.” Another interviewee stated that they would like to see more on governance and proactive interaction between fellows and their local legislators during the program.

Two of the interviewees suggested that in the future perhaps there should be different levels for the program. Maybe one year it is geared at a higher level and the next year a lower level. One of these interviewees hoped that there would have been a little less on basic public speaking skills and more on leadership development. Another interviewee stated that they would’ve liked to have seen greater stress put on homework assignment preparation and more meaningful feedback on assignments. This interviewee would have also have liked to have seen greater direction or even examples of how assignments were expected to be completed.

Other suggestions for modification included ensuring that the RULE program remains current and ensure that there is a diversity of participants. Another interviewee suggested that “instead of spending money on fancy places that perhaps the program should invest in some more dynamic speakers.” Another interviewee also mentioned that instead of the “train of speakers” maybe the program should allow for more depth as a lot seem to be “jammed into the workshops.”

4.4.8 Question 5: For many leadership programs such as RULE we hear of “return on investment” which includes mainly time and money, but we seldom hear of “return on expectations.” What was your return on expectations based on your experience in RULE?

Five of the interviewees noted that the RULE program had exceeded their expectations. Two of the five interviewees pointed out that the RULE program had exceeded expectation while they were enrolled while the other three stated that the expectations were exceeded over time after they had left the program. One of the interviewees said that “the program was great at that point in their life and prepared them for the future and the network that was established also opened doors.” Another interviewee praised the skills that they learned in the program and credited them with their professional advancement but this appreciation for the return on expectations did not come immediately. Another interviewee stated, “...that they did not expect to grow so much personally, but it wasn’t just that as the program also helped to increase their aspirations both professionally and politically.”

Three of the interviewees stated that going into the RULE program that they had no expectations or could not judge their expectations. One of these interviewees noted that after the first Institute they almost did not proceed with the program. They did note that they believe that if they would have had expectations initially, they believe that they would have been exceeded. Another interviewee stated that they, “did not see the value when first finished the program but now recognizes that value as time has gone by’.

When it comes to not exceeding expectations, one interviewee felt the program did not reach expectations while another believed the program “broke even.” The interviewee that thought the program did not reach expectations expected a more challenging program. They

stated, “that they performed to the expectation of the program which was not high. For some in my class it might have been challenging, but to me, it wasn’t”. The other interviewee did not find the experience to be negative, but it simply wasn’t what they expected. The interviewee stated, “...the program had more of a personal effect as opposed to a professional effect which is what I expected.” They noted that they had received value, but it was just in a different way than they had anticipated.

4.4.9 Question 6: What would you suggest the program include or remove in order to improve the curriculum?

One theme for improvement of the program had more to do with direction and feedback in regards to assignments and objectives as opposed to curriculum changes. Five of the interviewees stated something in this regard. Three of the interviewees stated that they would have liked to see more direction when it came to establishing Individual Learning Contracts (ILC). All three of these interviewees believed that the ILC goals should be driven more towards professional change as opposed to “superficial” goals such as “losing weight or improving participant’s wardrobe.” One interviewee suggested that at the end of the program that participants, “report out to the entire class in order to provide for a greater sense of accountability.”

Two interviewees also suggested that there should be more public speaking assignments and that they should allow for more constructive critique. One of the interviewees stated, “Participants can skate through some of the speaking assignments without touching on a difficult conversation or something that they actually had to prepare for.” Another interviewee shared that they thought there should be more take home responsibility. The interviewee stated, “Assignments should be more rigorous so that earning the certificate and commendation from

the legislature is worthy of the recognition.” Another interviewee also specifically mentioned the public issue assignment and stated that it wasn’t necessarily a public issue assignment but more of a team building project. The interviewee suggested that the teams be given an issue and be asked to look at all sides and perform an open debate for the class.

In regards to curriculum improvement, there was mention by three of the interviewees for an increase in an international focus. All three identified that the opportunity would allow for different perspectives on agriculture. Another interviewee also suggested that instead of an international component perhaps an exchange could be organized amongst different programs in different regions of the United States. Another interviewee added that perhaps a third year could be added, “in order to further challenge leadership and present the class with the opportunity to join the International Leadership Alumni Conference (ILAC).” All of these interviewees did acknowledge the issue of funding and that these ideas were most likely improbable. Another interviewee suggested that the RULE program take out the global leadership perspective because this is a state program, not a national or international program.

Three of the interviewees also mentioned economic development and tourism as something that could be strengthened in the curriculum. One of the interviewees suggested that the program interact more with industry outside of agriculture along with the various economic and community development agencies that are local to the areas that the program visits. Another interviewee shared that some of these agencies rely on volunteer advisors and boards. This interviewee stated, “this should be done in an effort to show participants how they can take back what they learn to their own communities and organizations to show how they can get involved and make positive change.” Two other interviewees mentioned the idea of including regional projects to the curriculum. These regional projects could include community organizations and

would help participants develop leadership skills and confidence for taking on projects and leading these types of efforts in their community.

Interviewees also shared other ideas for the improvement of the program and its curriculum. Two of the interviewees again advised making the application process more “difficult” so that those with basic skills are kept out so that the program can concentrate on higher level skills. One interviewee stated that regarding governance the program should focus more on how to lobby or advocate for their various causes. One interviewee indicated that the program should concentrate more on the professional aspect as opposed to the personal level. Two interviewees mentioned the military dimension of the program and suggested that these presentations should focus more on leadership than patriotic concerns as that is not why participants are there. Another interviewee also wanted to see more of a focus on leadership skills as opposed to personal skills. One last interviewee also suggested for the sake of quick and honest feedback that the program utilize an electronic means as opposed to paper evaluation sheets.

4.4.10 Question 6B: What would you suggest the RULE program do to improve alumni relations and involvement?

Alumni engagement is an issue that all of the alumni that were interviewed had something to share. One of the interviewees put it rather bluntly with, “do they engage their alumni.” Another interviewee that is involved in alumni activity also stated that alumni engagement was an issue because of the small percentage of alumni that are not just actively involved but the few that are slightly engaged. Most of the interviewees agreed that there needed to be more alumni engagement because they found that the “friendship bond is strong” among alumni. Another interviewee stated that the desire is there as some gather informally when they leave the

program. One interviewee indicated that the RULE program, “needs to engage alumni on a different level than just asking alumni to come to Farm Show or Ag Progress Days twice a year.” Three of the interviewees did identify that geographic distance is the largest barrier to alumni engagement as alumni are spread across the state.

The most common interest mentioned by interviewees for alumni engagement was that the RULE program should hold some regional events. Six of the interviewees said this in one way or another. Two interviewees stated that the RULE program should have a regional event just for alumni. These interviewees indicated that perhaps there should be a focus on one topic too, “allow for a deeper dive.” One of these interviewees said that this would, let the RULE program to concentrate on the next level of leadership.” Another interviewee suggested that local Extension facilities could be used not only to reduce fees but also to connect locally.

The other four interviewees that mentioned regional engagement advised that this should be done with the current class as it travels around the state for its Institutes. Two interviewees said, “This doesn’t need to be done every time but plan it out so that perhaps one year the effort is in southeastern Pennsylvania and the next year in another part of the state.” Another interviewee said that if this is done it should be tied to a learning event, not just dinner or a networking event.

All of the interviewees mentioned cost as part of alumni engagement. Most of them acknowledged that they were aware that funds were tight and that a lot of the cost would fall to the alumni to participate. One interviewee stated, “There is no doubt a cost, but if you can get alumni engaged in such events they will pay their share.” Another interviewee said, and another concurred, “That there is a cost and that should be covered along with maybe a program donation but let the alumni know this much is the cost and this much is the donation.” Two interviewees

did cite that when there are receptions either for alumni or at networking events, there should either be a “sponsored” bar or access to a cash bar as there are expectations for such occasions

Development was also another issue that was highlighted by interviewees for alumni engagement. Four of the interviewees identified that alumni need to be utilized as a better source of development. One interviewee stated that they “see a lost opportunity to fundraise as state funding dwindles.” Another interviewee said that “It can’t be as simple as sending out one letter a year asking for money.” One interviewee advised that there should be a concentrated effort with College development for direct appeals because “most alumni will give something if they are asked in the proper way.” Two interviewees suggested that the idea of donating and recruiting should be a clear expectation of program participants after they graduate and this should be communicated during the latter half of the program.

Four of the interviewees mentioned more communication and use of social media. If there is an issue with social media one interviewee suggested an e-newsletter that could be sent out a couple of times per year, “In this way, the RULE program could get out information without the high cost of postage.” One of the interviewees cited that the lack of internet presence is an issue, “as all there is is the website.” Two of the interviewees advised allowing full access to all alumni whether they are dues-paying or not as “part of the programs lure is the network, and that shouldn’t be limited.” Two of the interviewees suggested that all of this takes time and suggested that the program enlists an intern or two that are majoring in marketing and communications.

One alumnus also suggested that with the alumni database there be a way to “track alumni and what they could do for a class that was meeting in their region. They felt it was always interesting and showed another value of the RULE program when “alumni were there to

open doors.” Two other alumni stated that alumni should be asked to volunteer more either at the state level or the regional level. They believed that most of the alumni have a good feeling towards the program and that if they were asked they would try to do more.

4.5 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

4.5.1 Summary Data for Questions 1 through 7.

Table 4.3: Summary data for questions 1-7 including mean, std. dev., and percentages

Please rate your growth in the following area.....	Mean	Std. Dev.	None	Little	Moderate	Lot	Great Deal
Q #1-Awareness of issues facing agriculture/agribusiness	3.53	0.99	1.35%	13.51%	35.14%	31.08%	18.92%
Q #2-Public issue awareness beyond agricultural concerns	3.65	1.03	1.35%	14.86%	24.32%	36.49%	22.97%
Q #3-Process and procedures surround. policy making/leg. Process	3.31	1.08	2.70%	22.97%	31.08%	27.03%	16.22%
Q #4-Connecting with government officials	3.43	1.12	2.70%	21.62%	25.68%	29.73%	20.27%
Q #5-Networking with other leaders in your comm. and profession	3.58	1.09	2.70%	14.86%	28.38%	29.73%	24.32%
Q #6-Confidence in public speaking	3.7	1.18	2.70%	17.57%	20.27%	25.68%	33.78%
Q #7-Taking on a leadership role in a group activity	3.61	1.14	4.05%	12.16%	31.08%	24.32%	28.38%

Alumni were asked to rate their growth in seven areas that are addressed by the RULE program curriculum. Confidence in public speaking was ranked the highest in regards to Mean with a 3.7 and in the rate of growth with 59.46% of alumni indicating that they grew at least “A Lot.” Public issue awareness beyond agricultural concerns was ranked as the second highest with a Mean of 3.65 and ranked second in the rate of growth with 59.46% of alumni indicating that they grew at least “A Lot.” The difference is that when it came to confidence in public speaking 33.78% reported they grew “A Great Deal” while public issues beyond agricultural saw

only 22.97% indicate that they grew “A Great Deal.” Taking on a leadership role in a group activity was the third highest ranked regarding Mean with 3.61 and ranked fourth in the rate of growth of 52.7% of alumni indicating that they grew at least “A Lot.” Taking on a leadership role in a group activity did rank second regarding alumni reporting that they grew “A Great Deal” with 28.38% indicating that level of growth. Process and procedures surrounding the legislative process had the lowest mean with 3.1 and only 43.25% of alumni reported that they grew at least “A Lot.”

4.5.2 Question 8: Of the ten program areas rank the top three which you found to be the most valuable in regards to your leadership trajectory after RULE with one being the most valuable.

Table 4.4: Summary data for Question 8

Program Area	%	#	%	#	%	#	Total	% of total
Agriculture	1.35%	1	6.76%	5	8.11%	6	12	5.41%
Communication Skills	16.22%	12	28.38%	21	20.27%	15	48	21.62%
Culture	0.00%	0	1.35%	1	2.70%	2	3	1.35%
Economic Development/Tourism	9.46%	7	6.76%	5	10.81%	8	20	9.01%
Governance	6.76%	5	2.70%	2	9.46%	7	14	6.30%
Group Process	6.75%	5	13.51%	10	10.81%	8	23	10.36%
Health Care	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%
Leadership Studies	8.11%	6	20.27%	15	22.98%	17	38	17.12%
National/International Relations	1.35%	1	1.35%	1	4.05%	3	5	2.25%
Professional/Personal Development	50.00%	37	18.92%	14	10.81%	8	59	26.58%
	100.00%	74	100.00%	74	100.00%	74	222	100.00%

Of the ten program areas, professional/personal development represented the highest percentage of the total when it came to what aspect of the curriculum alumni valued the most for their leadership trajectories with 26.58%. Communication skills were ranked the second highest regarding the percentage of the total with 21.62%. Leadership studies were ranked third with

17.12% of the total. National/International relations and culture were ranked the lowest representing only 2.25% and 1.35% of the total.

4.5.3 Question 9: Of the 10 program areas denote the one that you would have liked to learn more about?

Table 4.5: Summary table for Question 9 includes percentages

Econ Dev/ Tourism	Nat./Int'l Relations	Governance	Leadership Studies	Culture	Group Process	Health care	Prof/Pers Develop	Comm. Skills	Agric.
20.27%	17.57%	12.16%	10.81%	9.46%	8.11%	8.11%	6.76%	5.41%	1.35%
15	13	9	8	7	6	6	5	4	1

Of the ten program areas, the most popular area that alumni would have liked to learn more about fell under Economic development/tourism with 20.27%. National/International Relations ranked second regarding what alumni would have liked to have learned more about with 15.57% indicating that. Governance was ranked third with 12.16% of alumni reporting that they wanted to find out more about that topic area. Agriculture and communication skills were ranked the lowest regarding what alumni would have liked to have learned more about.

4.5.4 Question 10: Before starting the RULE program did you believe that you would experience more growth personally or professionally?

Table 4.6: Summary data for Question 10 including percentages

Personally	24.32%	18
Professionally	75.68	56

4.5.5 Question 11: After completing the RULE program do you believe that you experienced more growth personally or professionally?

Table 4.7: Summary table for Question 11 including percentages

Personally	66.22%	49
Professionally	33.78%	25

The vast majority of RULE alumni, 75.68% believed that when they started the program, they would experience more growth professionally as opposed to personally. After completing the program the majority or 66.22% thought that they grew more personally as opposed to professionally.

4.5.6 Question 12: How effective do you believe the RULE program was in providing you with leadership skills for your personal and professional development?

Table 4.8: Summary table for Question 12 including percentages

Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Very Effective	Extremely Effective
0.00%	16.22%	13.51%	44.59%	25.68%
0	12	10	33	19

The majority of alumni believed that the RULE program was effective in providing leadership skills for their personal and professional development with 70.27% indicating that they found it to be at least “Very Effective.” None of the respondents found the RULE program to be “Not Effective” when it came to providing leadership skills for their personal and professional development.

4.5.7 Question 13: To what extent did the RULE program increase your aspirations for future leadership positions?

Table 4.9: Summary table for Question 13 including percentages

None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
8.11%	12.16%	27.03%	32.43%	20.27%
6	9	20	24	15

The majority of alumni believed that the RULE program did increase their aspirations for future leadership positions. Over half or 52.7% of alumni identified that the RULE program increased their aspirations by “A lot.” Only 8.11% found that the RULE program did not increase their aspirations for future leadership positions.

4.5.8 Question 14: Since completing the RULE program to what extent have you experienced an increase in leadership responsibilities?

Table 4.10: Summary table for Question 14 including percentages

None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
2.70%	13.51%	28.38%	35.14%	20.27%
2	10	21	26	15

The majority of alumni did experience an increase in leadership responsibilities after completing the RULE program. Over half or 55.41% identified that they did experience at least “A lot” of leadership responsibilities after finishing the program. Only 2.70% found that they did not experience an increase in leadership responsibilities.

4.5.9 Question 15: To what extent did the RULE program meet your expectations?

Table 4.112: Summary table for Question 15 including percentages

Far Short	Short	Equals	Exceeds	Far Exceeds
0.00%	8.11%	24.32%	41.89%	25.68%
0	6	18	31	19

According to 67.57% of alumni, the RULE program exceeded their expectations with 25.68% indicating that the program far exceeded their expectations. Almost a quarter or 24.32% stated that the program equaled expectations. Some alumni or 8.11% reported that the RULE program fell short of their expectations.

4.5.10 Question 16: Do you believe that participation in RULE was worth your overall investment?

Table 4.12: Summary table for question 16 including percentages

Definitely Not	Probably Not	Might or Might Not	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
1.35%	2.70%	2.70%	24.32%	68.92%
1	2	2	18	51

The majority of RULE program alumni believed that the participation in the program was worth their overall investment. The largest percentage of alumni or 68.92% indicated “Definitely Yes” when it came to whether their participation in the RULE program was worth their overall investment. Only one survey participant or 1.35% reported that the RULE program was not worth their investment.

4.5.11 Question 17: Please indicate how important you believe it is to continue the RULE program.

Table 4.13: Summary table for question 17 including percentages

Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
1.35%	2.70%	16.22%	22.97%	56.76%
1	2	12	17	42

The majority of RULE program alumni indicated that they believed that the program was important to continue. The largest percentage of alumni or 56.76% reported that the program was “Extremely” important to continue and 22.97% indicated that it was “Very” important to

continue the program. Only one survey participant or 1.35% reported that they believed that the RULE program was “Not at all” important to continue.

4.5.12 Question 18: Reflecting back on the RULE program, what aspect did you value the most that helped to contribute to your personal and/or professional growth?

Table 4.14: Summary data for question 18 including major themes stated

Aspect that contributed to personal and/or professional growth	# of times stated
Networking/Relationships	26
Confidence Building	13
Team building/group process	11
Rotation of institutes and opportunity to learn and experience different areas	11
Public speaking exercises	9
Diversity of participants	7
Rotation of assignments/responsibilities	5
Personality Assessments	5
Communication/Listening skills	4
Interaction with elected officials and other government officials	4
Goal setting exercises	2
Professional marketability	2

Alumni identified several aspects of the RULE program that they believed contributed to their personal and/or professional growth. Networking and relationships were the most identified aspects that RULE alumni identified as having the most value for their personal and/or professional growth. Confidence building was the second most recognized aspect that RULE alumni valued when it came to personal and/or professional growth. Team building/group process and rotation of the study institutes and the opportunity to learn about the different areas of Pennsylvania tied for the third most valuable aspect that led to personal and/or professional growth.

4.5.13 Question 19: What would you suggest the RULE program include to improve the effectiveness of the program?

Table 4.15: Summary data for question 19 including alumni suggestions

Alumni suggestion	# of times suggested
Continued opportunities for alumni after graduation	8
More governance and interaction with public officials	6
More objective exercises and presentations as opposed to subjective	6
Greater diversification in participants and speakers	5
Provide a post-graduation update of other participants to see their path	4
Gather feedback from sponsors as to what they believe should be included	3
Emphasize more on leadership principles	3
Provide more opportunities for public speeches	3
Concentrate on other rural issues besides just agriculture	3
Development of mentorships with alumni	2
Take a closer look at communities visiting	2
Provide more opportunities to lead the group	2
Provide an opportunity for an international component	2
Increase social media/outreach	2
Include an individual project that includes community development	2
Increase awareness that expected to grow both professionally and personally	1
Reduce some of the activities to allow for greater depth of critical topics	1
Include significant others and family more	1
Define expectations of alumni	1
Make the evaluation process more efficient	1
Include more governmental agencies besides agricultural related	1
Pick a level. Is the program advanced or basic?	1

Alumni made several suggestions when it came to improving the effectiveness of the RULE program. Continued opportunities for alumni after graduation was the most mentioned suggestion for improving the effectiveness of the program. More governance along with interaction with government officials and more objective assignments and presentations were tied for the second most suggestions for program improvement. The third most frequented suggestion for program improvement involved a greater diversification of participants and speakers.

4.5.14 Question 20: What would you suggest the RULE program do to engage alumni further?

Table 4.16: Summary data for question 20 including alumni suggestions

Alumni suggestion	# of times suggested
Have a yearly/bi-yearly education reunion for alumni	18
Communicate via an e-newsletter, social media, or an online forum	13
Have regional reunions with current Study Institutes while in the area	13
Invite via phone or email alumni to Study Institutes/events not a blanket email	11
Offer a class by a PSU professor/professional for a fee for continuing education or continuing education webinars	6
Encourage successful alumni/panel to speak at Study Institutes	4
Create a schedule at the beginning of the year notifying alumni when they would be invited to Study Institutes/events	4
Lower the fees/eliminate dues	3
Create a mentorship program	2
Promote ILAC/IAPAL	2
Poll alumni on what they would be willing to do to enhance programming	2
Hire an intern, part-time, or volunteer person to handle marketing, communication, and engagement	2
Allow for online donations/online dues payment	2
Utilize Extension spaces for alumni workshops to cut costs	1
Promote successful alumni in communications	1
Regional events to promote recruitment and fundraise	1
Openly share alumni list with information to improve networking	1
Form an alumni engagement committee	1
Stronger strategy to engage alumni for development purposes	1
Openly communicate with alumni about budget situation to perpetuate development and advocacy	1

The topic of alumni engagement offered a broad range of suggestions made by alumni. An alumni reunion either on a yearly or a bi-yearly basis was mentioned the most by alumni when it came to the RULE program engaging with alumni. More frequent communication either through an e-newsletter and/or social media and combining an alumni event with a current Study Institute were the second most popular suggestions made by alumni for engagement. The third most mentioned suggestion was a combination of communication and events. Alumni requested that they receive a personal invite as opposed to a blanket email.

4.5.15 Survey Demographic Data

Table 4.17: Demographic data of survey sample population

Question 21: What is your sex?	%	Count
Male	33.78%	25
Female	66.22%	49
Total	100%	74
Question 22: What was your age at time of program enrollment?		
20-29	13.51%	10
30-39	20.27%	15
40-49	35.14%	26
50-59	27.03%	20
60-69	4.05%	3
70+	0.00%	0
Total	100%	74
Questions 23: What would you identify as your personal yearly income before taxes?		
\$0-\$39,999	9.86%	7
\$40,000-\$59,999	23.94%	17
\$60,000-\$79,999	25.35%	18
\$80,000-\$99,999	26.76%	19
More than \$100,000	14.08%	10
Total	100%	71
Question 24: What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?		
Less than high school degree	0.00%	0
High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	2.74%	2
Some college but no degree	13.70%	10

Table 4.17 continued; Demographic data of survey sample population (continued)

Associate degree in college (2-year)	9.59%	7
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	41.10%	30
Master's degree	31.51%	23
Doctoral degree	0.00%	0
Professional degree (JD, MD)	1.37%	1
Total	100%	73
Question 25: Each RULE participant is asked to make an annual contribution towards their personal investment in their leadership education while enrolled in RULE. How was your investment paid for?		
Personal Funds	39.19%	29
Employer Funds	44.59%	33
Scholarship	12.16%	9
Other	4.05%	3
Total	100%	74

Of the alumni that responded to the survey, the majority were women at 66.22%. The survey respondents represented a cross-section of ages of RULE program participants. At the time of program enrollment, the vast majority or 82.44% were between the ages of 30 and 59. The younger demographic or 33.78% of the survey respondents were between the ages of 20 and 39 at time of program enrollment. On the other side of demographic data for age, 31.08% were over the age of 50 at the time of program enrollment.

When it came to what alumni that responded to the survey would identify as their personal yearly income the data represented a bell-curve. The majority of survey respondents or 76.05% reported that their incomes were between \$40,000 and \$99,999. At the top end of the income spectrum, 40.84% identified that their incomes were \$80,000 or more. At the bottom end of the income scale, only 9.86% of the survey respondents earned up to \$39,999. The highest level of education of survey respondents was slanted towards those that had a bachelor's degree or greater. Of the respondents, 73.98% had a bachelor's degree or greater, and nearly a third or 32.88% had a master's degree or greater. How alumni paid for their investment in the

RULE program was distributed across four different ways. Of the alumni that responded 44.59% identified that their employer paid for their participation while 39.19% identified used exclusively personal funds.

4.6 AGGREGATE DATA

Aggregate data was not applied to every question within this study. The first section of the survey that included questions directly related to the curriculum was not included in the aggregate analysis. Aggregate data was used on select questions mainly to do in some way with program satisfaction and development after the program. In some cases, the Qualtrics system could not aggregate the data as the software did not allow for it. Factors that were considered for analysis included the demographic data that was collected by the survey. Collected demographic data included sex, age, income, education, and how the alumnus contributed to their investment in leadership education.

4.6.1 Question 10: Before starting the RULE program did you believe that you would experience more growth personally or professionally?

Overall respondent's anticipated growing more professionally at a rate of 75.68% as compared to personally at 24.32%. Females did expect to grow more professionally with 77.55% indicating that as opposed to 72.00% of males. Those respondents that were between the ages of 20 to 49 anticipated more growth professionally at 78.14% while those over 50 expected more growth professionally at a lesser rate of 69.56%. Respondents who identified their income to be below \$59,999 expected to grow more professionally at 83.33% while those that identified

their income as \$60,000 and over expected to grow more professionally at a lower rate of 70.21%. Respondents that had up to a Bachelor's degree identified at 71.42% that they anticipated growing more professionally while those with a Master's or above believed that they would grow more professionally at a higher rate of 83.33%. Respondents that used their personal funds for their investment in the RULE program expected to grow more professionally at a percentage of 79.31% as opposed to those that benefited from employer sponsorship at 72.73%.

4.6.2 Question 11: After completing the RULE program do you believe that you experienced more growth personally or professionally?

Overall respondents found that they grew more personally at 66.22% as opposed to professionally at 33.78%. Males did find that they grew more personally with 68.00% indicating that as opposed to 65.31% of females. Those respondents that were between the ages of 20 to 49 reported that they grew more personally at 62.71% while respondents over the age of 50 reported that they grew more personally at a higher rate of 73.91%. In regards to income, those respondents that had an income below \$59,999 indicated that they grew more personally at a percentage of 66.66% while those with an income over \$60,000 indicated they benefited more personally at a higher rate of 68.08%. Respondents that used their personal funds for their investment in the RULE program indicated that they grew more personally at a percentage of 79.31% while respondents that had an employer investment reported more personal growth at a lower rate of 48.48%.

4.6.3 Question 12: How effective do you believe the RULE program was in providing you with leadership skills for your personal and professional development?

Overall respondents believed that the RULE program was at least “Very Effective” in providing leadership skills at a percentage rate of 70.27%. Females found the RULE program to be at least “Very Effective” at providing leadership skills at 75.55% while males found the program to be at least “Very effective” at a lower rate of 60.00%. Alumni that were between the ages of 20 to 49 found the program to be at least “Very Effective” at 74.50% while those alumni that were over the age of 50 found the program to be at least “Very Effective” at a lower rate of 60.86%. Alumni that identified their income level below \$59,999 indicated that they believed the program was at least “Very Effective” at 75.00% while those with income levels above \$60,000 reported a lower rate of “Very Effective” at 68.08%. Alumni that reported their schooling was up to a Bachelor’s degree indicated that the program was at least “Very Effective” at 75.51% while those that had a Master’s degree or above indicated that the program was “Very Effective” at a lower rate of 62.50%. Alumni that utilized personal funds towards the program indicated at 86.20% that the program was at least “Very Effective” while those that used employer funds indicated that the program was “Very Effective” at a lower rate of 57.57%.

4.6.4 Question 13: To what extent did the RULE program increase your aspirations for future leadership positions?

Overall respondents indicated that the RULE program increased their aspirations at least “A lot” at 52.70%. Females found the RULE program to increase aspirations at least “A lot” at 59.18% whereas males found the program to increase aspirations at least “A lot” at a lower rate of 40.00%. Alumni that were between the ages of 20 to 49 found that the program increased aspirations at least “A lot” at 58.82% while those alumni that were over the age of 50 identified

that their aspirations increased “A lot” at a lower rate of 39.10%. Those that identified their income level below \$59,999 indicated that the program increased their aspirations at least “A lot” at 58.33% while those that identified income levels above \$60,000 indicated a lower rate of at least “A lot” at 51.06%. Alumni that reported their schooling was up to a Bachelor’s degree reported that the program increased aspirations at least “A lot” at 53.06% whereas those with a Master’s or above indicated an increase in aspirations of at least “A lot” at a slightly higher rate of 54.16%. Alumni that utilized personal funds towards the program indicated at 62.06% that the program increased their aspirations at least ‘A lot” while those that used employer funds indicated that the program increased their aspirations at least “A lot” at a lower rate of 42.42%.

4.6.5 Question 14: Since completing the RULE program to what extent have you experienced an increase in leadership responsibilities?

Overall 55.41% of the respondents identified that they experienced an increase in leadership responsibilities at least “A lot.” Males indicated at 60.00% that they experienced an increase in leadership responsibilities at least “A lot” while females indicated an increase of at least “A lot” a lower rate of 53.06%. Alumni that were between the ages of 20 to 49 found that their leadership responsibilities increased at least “A lot” at 58.82% while those alumni over the age of 50 identified that their leadership responsibilities increased at least “A lot” at a lower rate of 47.82%. Alumni that identified their income level below \$59,999 indicated that their leadership responsibilities increased at least “A lot” at 45.83% while those that reported an income level above \$60,000 identified an increase in leadership responsibilities at least “A lot” at a higher rate of 59.57%. Alumni that indicated their educational attainment was up to Bachelor’s degree found that their leadership responsibilities increased at least “A lot” at 53.06% while alumni that had a Master’s degree or above indicated a slightly lower rate of 50.00%. Alumni

that used personal funds towards the program indicated at 75.86% that their leadership responsibilities increased at least “A lot” while alumni that were able to use employer funds indicated that their leadership responsibilities increased at least “A lot” at a significantly lower rate of 45.54%.

4.6.6 Question 15: To what extent did the RULE program meet your expectations?

Overall respondents indicated that the RULE program at least “Exceeded” expectations at 67.57%. Males found that the program at least “Exceeded” their expectations at 61.53% whereas females found the program at least “Exceeded” expectations at a higher rate of 69.38%. Alumni that were between the ages of 20 to 49 found that the program at least “Exceeded” their expectations at 72.54% while alumni that were over the age of 50 identified that the program at least “Exceeded” their expectations at a lower rate of 56.52%. Those that identified their income level below \$59,999 indicated that the program at least “Exceeded” their expectations at 75.00% while those that identified income levels above \$60,000 indicated a lower rate of 63.82%. Alumni that reported their schooling up to a Bachelor’s degree reported that the program at least “Exceeded” their expectations at 75.51% whereas those with Master’s or above indicated the program at least “Exceeded” their expectations at a lower rate of 54.16%. Alumni that used personal funds towards the program indicated that the program at least “Exceeded” their expectations at 79.31% while those that used employer funds indicated that the program at least “Exceeded” their expectations at a lower rate of 60.60%.

4.6.7 Question 16: Do you believe that participation in RULE was worth your overall investment?

Overall respondents indicated that the RULE program was at least “Probably yes” worth their overall investment at a percentage rate of 93.24%. Females believed that participation was at least “Probably yes” worth their investment at 97.95% whereas males thought that the program was worth their overall investment at a lower rate of 84.00%. Alumni that were between the ages of 20 to 49 found that the program was at least “Probably yes” worth their overall investment at 96.07% while those alumni that were over the age of 50 identified that the program was “Probably yes” worth their investment at a lower rate of 86.95%. Alumni that identified their income level below \$59,999 indicated that the program was at least “Probably yes” worth their investment at 95.83% while those that identified income levels above \$60,000 reported a slightly lower rate of at 93.61%. Alumni that identified their education level was up to a Bachelor’s degree indicated that the program was at least “Probably yes” worth their overall investment at 95.91%. Those with a Master’s degree or above indicated that the program was at least “Probably yes” worth their overall investment at a lower rate of 87.50%. Alumni that utilized personal funds toward the program indicated at 100.00% that the program was at least “Probably yes” worth their overall investment while those that used employer funds indicated that the program was “Probably yes” worth their overall investment at a lower rate of 87.87%.

4.6.8 Question 17: Please indicate how important you believe it is to continue the RULE program.

Overall respondents indicated that the RULE program was at least “Very” important to continue at 79.73%. Males believed that the RULE program was at least “Very” important to continue 80.00% while females believed that the program was at least “Very” important to

continue at 79.59%. Alumni between the ages of 20 to 49 believed that the program was at least “Very” important to continue at 80.39% while those alumni that were over the age of 50 identified that they believed it was at least “Very important” to continue the program at a slightly lower rate of 78.26%. Those that identified their income level below \$59,999 indicated that they believed the program was at least “Very” important at 83.33% while those that identified income levels above \$60,000 reported a lower rate of 80.85%. Alumni that indicated their educational attainment was up to a Bachelor’s degree indicated that they believed the continuation of the program was at least “Very” important at 83.67% while those with a Master’s or above indicated at a lower rate of 70.83% that the program was “Very” important to continue. Alumni that used personal funds towards their leadership investment indicated at 93.10% that the program was at least “Very” important to continue while those that utilized employer funds indicated that the program was at least “Very” important at a lower rate of 66.66%.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the qualitative and quantitative study results. By utilizing a semi-structured interview, Chapter Four revealed the thoughts and opinions of 10 RULE alumni who participated in the RULE program in the last 15 years. Also, by utilizing a Qualtrics survey, Chapter Four revealed the thoughts and opinions of 74 RULE alumni who also participated in the RULE program over the last 15 yrs. The data from the interviews was summarized, and the data from the Qualtrics surveys was also summarized and presented through tables. Aggregate data was also presented based on demographic information provided by the survey respondents.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Presented in this chapter are the summary of the findings including perceived gains and what alumni valued about the RULE program. Recommendations from the RULE assessment protocol including recruitment, program modification and improvement, and alumni engagement are included. Included is how many of the findings in this study relate to previous studies on agricultural leadership programs and the literature. Aggregate data is also included to show some of the differences in responses based on provided demographic information. This research protocol utilized a semi-structured interview with 10 RULE alumni and a Qualtrics survey that garnered 74 completed responses from RULE alumni that have participated in the RULE program over the last 15 years.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.2.1 Perceived Gains

Four of the ten interviewees perceived that they would grow more professionally as opposed to personally while two anticipated growing both personally and professionally. The major

perception of alumni that participated in the survey when they first started the RULE program was that they would grow more professionally as opposed to personally. According to the survey data, 75.68% of alumni believed that they would experience more growth professionally. That perception is almost inverted after participating in the RULE program according to the survey data as 66.22% of the alumni believe that they experienced more growth personally as opposed to professionally.

The aggregate data shows that gender and income provided little difference in personal or professional growth. Differences were found in that alumni between the ages of 20 to 49 reported they grew more personally at 62.71% while respondents over the age of 50 stated that they grew more personally at a higher rate of 73.91%. Respondents that used personal funds for their investment in the program indicated that they grew more personally at 79.31% as compared to those that benefited from an employer investment at a lower rate of 48.48%. According to the data respondents that were between the ages of 20 to 49 believed they grew more professionally as opposed to personally at a higher rate and those that benefitted from an employer contribution felt that they gained professionally at a much higher rate than those that used personal funds.

In addressing the agricultural component of the RULE program, most of the interviewees thought that it was educationally beneficial. According to survey data, 98.65% identified growth in awareness of issues facing agriculture/agribusiness. Half of the alumni, 50% identified that they grew “A Lot” or a “A Great Deal.” Interviewees were impressed with the complexity and diversity of agricultural products that are produced in Pennsylvania. Specifically, interviewees felt it beneficial to see the different sizes of operations, rural versus urban agriculture, and how innovative producers are especially in regards to agritourism. Diem and Nikola (2005) also cited

that participants in the agricultural leadership program they studied appreciated learning about the broader relationship of agriculture within the overall economic system and society.

A greater appreciation and understanding of the political side of agriculture was also a theme found amongst the interviewees. Carter and Rudd (2000) found that alumni they studied also had a greater appreciation of the different political issues facing agriculture and a broader sense of issues affecting the industry. Learning the importance of advocacy for not only agriculture but also their causes was also mentioned by alumni from this study.

Interviewed alumni identified public speaking the most when it came to what they perceived they gained from participating in the RULE program. They recognized that they sharpened their skills or they gained confidence in their ability to speak publicly successfully. Survey respondents also identified that they grew when it came to confidence in public speaking with 97.3% citing at least “A Little Growth” and 59.46% citing either “A Lot” or “A Great Deal.” Improved listening skills and ability to understand opposing viewpoints was also a skill identified by interviewees as being gained through program participation. These findings are consistent with those found throughout the literature as Black and Earnest (2009), Carter and Rudd (2000) and Diem and Nikola (2005) also found that agricultural leadership program participants experienced positive growth in regards to communication skills and alumni confidence in practicing things such as public speaking.

Networking was also identified as another significant benefit that was gained by participating in the RULE program according to both interviewees and survey respondents. Survey respondents identified growth with 97.3% citing at least “A Little.” Over half of the alumni, 54.05% responding that growth to either be “A Lot” or “A Great Deal.” These networks were not only beneficial on a professional level, but interviewees also noted on a personal level.

Black and Earnest (2009) also found that networks were valuable to participants in agricultural leadership programs not only on a business level but also on a personal level.

Other benefits of the RULE program for interviewees included learning conflict management skills and a greater understanding of personality types. Some interviewees also mentioned that they benefitted from the RULE program by learning how to balance and prioritize their personal and professional life. Work and life balance management was also found to be a benefit of participating in the agricultural leadership programs cited by Black and Earnest (2009) and Diem and Nikola (2005).

Survey respondents rated other components of the RULE curriculum favorable regarding growth. Most respondents identified that they grew in other public issues beyond agricultural concerns. Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Campbell (1996) and Diem and Nikola (2005) in their studies also found that alumni grew outside of agricultural issues including economic, social, and governance. Other alumni in this study reported a greater confidence, ability, and skills in taking on a leadership role in a group activity. Whent and Leising (1992) and Carter and Rudd (2000) also found that participants in their study identified an increase in leadership skills.

For many of the participants in the RULE program, the attraction was state level interactions with government officials. Survey respondents also rated high levels of growth regarding both the process and procedures related to the legislative process and connecting with government officials. According to the survey data, 97.3% of respondents identified that they grew at least “A Little” in both the legislative process and connecting with government officials with over half, 50.1% responding that they believed they grew “A Lot” or “A Great Deal.”

Overall respondents thought that the RULE program was at least “Very Effective” in providing leadership skills at a percentage rate of 70.27%. Whent and Leising (1992) also found

that participants in their study positively rated themselves as changing in regards to leadership skills. Females found the program to be more at least “Very Effective” at providing leadership skills at 75.55% which is a higher rate than males at 60.86%. Younger alumni also found the program to at least “Very Effective” at a 74.50% which was a higher rate than older alumni at 60.86%. The most striking difference was with those that utilized personal funds indicating that the program was at least “Very Effective” at 86.20% while those that used employer funds reported a much lower rate of 57.75% that the program was at least “Very Effective.”

Since completing the RULE program, 55.41% of the respondents identified that they experienced an increase in leadership responsibilities at least “A lot.” Black (2007), Horner (1984), and Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016) in their studies also reported that participants experienced an increase in leadership responsibilities. Males indicated at a higher rate of 60.00% that they experienced an increase in leadership responsibilities of at least “A lot” whereas females reported at a rate of 53.06%. Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Campbell (1996) also found that males had experienced a greater increase in leadership responsibilities compared to females. Alumni that indicated a higher level of income also stated that they had experienced a higher level of leadership responsibilities at 59.57% as compared to those at a lower level of income at 45.83%. Those that utilized their personal funds indicated at a much higher rate that their leadership responsibilities increased at least “A lot” at 75.86 whereas those that used personal funds identified at a much lower rate of 45.54%

5.2.2 Valued

While alumni were initially looking to participate in the RULE program, they valued different aspects of the program and saw the RULE program benefitting them in various ways. A couple

of the interviewees identified that they were at “crossroads” in their lives and that they believed the RULE program could help them find some direction. Other alumni thought the RULE program would provide them with tools to grow personally and professionally. Some alumni decided to take part in the RULE program because they thought it would allow for a deeper level and be more rigorous as compared to some of the local or county programs that they had investigated.

A couple of the alumni were looking for a way to get more involved in their communities and believed that the RULE program could help them make those connections. Many of the interviewed alumni also mentioned that they decided to join the RULE program because it appeared as though it would offer better opportunities to network at a higher level than local or county programs would offer. Networking and relationship building was identified as being the most valuable aspect of the RULE program that helped to contribute to personal and/or professional growth according to the survey data. Networking was also highly valued in the studies done by Carter and Rudd (2000) and Diem and Nikola (2005). Kaufman and Carter (2005) reported in their study that networking led to a certain level of social capital that increased the “capacity building” of the alumni and that is why it was considered so valuable.

The agricultural component of the RULE program was also valued as a learning experience for those who were familiar with agriculture as well as for those who were not. Alumni noted that the agricultural component allowed for a valuable learning experience that other leadership programs would not have allowed. Alumni valued the exposure to all the different types of agriculture along with the diversity of operations visited. Other alumni valued seeing how agriculture was part of the larger community. For those that were familiar with

agriculture, they valued the experience and sharing with others their knowledge. The RULE program also reaffirmed some of the alumni's interest and support of agriculture.

Many of the RULE alumni credited the RULE program with acting as a catalyst for either personal or professional development or both. Carter and Rudd (2000) along with Diem and Nikola (2005) also cited in their studies that participant's interests were motivated for ongoing personal and professional development. Others valued the program because they believed it helped lead to career advancement or at least the confidence to pursue advancement. Whent and Leising (1992) and Diem and Nikola (2005) both found in their studies that program participants also believed that the programs helped advance their careers. According to the survey data confidence building was identified as one of the most valuable aspects of the RULE program that led to either personal and/or professional growth which was also confirmed by the study done by Diem and Nikola (2005).

Alumni also valued the program because they believed that the RULE program resulted in an increase in their aspirations either personally, professionally, or even politically. According to the survey data, 91.89% identified that their aspirations for future leadership positions did increase from participating in the RULE program. Over half of the alumni, 52.7% identified that their aspirations increased at least "A Lot." Females experienced a greater increase in aspirations with 59.18% identifying an increase of at least "A lot" whereas males experienced an increase of at least "A Lot" at 40.00%. Alumni that were younger had a greater increase in aspirations of at least "A Lot" at 58.82% as compared to those alumni were older with a reported increase of aspirations of at least "A Lot" at 39.10%. Another significant difference was found in alumni that provided their personal funds for the program and those that utilized employer funds. Those that provided personal funds indicated that their aspiration

increased at least “A lot” at 62.06% while those that used employer funds reported a lower rate of 42.42%.

When it came to the ten focus areas of the RULE curriculum interview alumni identified several aspects that they found to be valuable. Communication skills were the most mentioned part of the curriculum that alumni that were interviewed found to be the most valuable. Confidence in public speaking, active listening, and meeting management were the most identified parts of the curriculum related to communications that alumni found to be the most valuable. According to the survey data communication skills was also highly valued by alumni and was identified as second in the rankings of the most valuable aspect of the RULE curriculum.

Alumni also recognized professional and personal development as being particularly valuable. Alumni stated that understanding personality types and leadership styles was valuable. Carter and Rudd (2000) also found that alumni in their study valued learning about personality types and how they're own interacted with others in a group dynamic. Black (2007) also indicated that participants also gained knowledge of themselves and became more aware of differences amongst groups. These kinds of workshops and activities allowed alumni to learn how to work with others efficiently.

Group projects and group process were also mentioned as being valuable in contributing to leadership skills. Some alumni stated that it was valuable for them to realize that they had the capability to lead a group in a project. Survey participants also identified team building and group process as being one of the most valuable aspects of the RULE program that helped to result in personal and/or professional growth. Carter and Rudd (2000) also found that

participants in their study valued group activities as alumni appreciated the diversity and believed that group activities helped strengthen their ability to deal more effectively with others.

The survey data identified professional and personal development as being the most valuable aspect of the curriculum and leadership studies was ranked third in the ten-program area curriculum. Included in this could also be group process, which was ranked as being the fourth most valuable component of the RULE curriculum. Diem and Nikola (2005) along with Kaufman and Carter (2005) also found that effective team and group process was identified in their studies as a valuable aspect of the agricultural leadership program that they researched.

Governance was also identified as being valuable by alumni when it came to the RULE curriculum. Alumni felt it was valuable because it gave participants the knowledge and confidence to approach legislators about their concerns to advocate. Carter and Rudd (2000) found in their study that alumni also had a greater understanding and a better comfort level working within the political process and with legislators. Alumni also identified that the governance aspect of the curriculum was valuable because it allowed them to see the bigger picture of how government interacts at the local, state, and federal level.

Alumni also reported that the governance component allowed them to establish state level networks that they have found valuable on a personal and professional level. Whent and Leising (1992) also found that alumni valued interactions with government officials and establishing networks. Governance was not rated as valuable according to the survey data being ranked as the sixth most valuable aspect of the curriculum.

Alumni also stated that they found how the Study Institutes move around Pennsylvania to be valuable. It was found to be valuable because it allowed for participants to learn about the breadth that Pennsylvania has to offer regarding agriculture, industry, tourism, and culture.

According to the survey data economic and community development/tourism ranked as the fifth most valuable component of the RULE curriculum. Rotation of institutes and the opportunity to experience different areas was also identified as one of the top tier aspects of the program that was valued for personal and/or professional growth. Traveling around the program area was also found to be a beneficial aspect of the agricultural leadership program that Whent and Leising (1992) studied. Other alumni that were interviewed valued being engaged in projects as opposed to only sitting and passively learning.

The majority of alumni also reported that the RULE program had at least “Exceeded” their expectations at a rate of 67.57%. Diem and Nikola (2005) found in their study that the majority of alumni reported that the program that they studied had their expectations exceeded and at the least most stated that their expectations were met. Females found that the program at least ‘Exceeded” their expectations at 69.38% where males reported 61.53%. Younger alumni expectations were at least “Exceeded” at 72.54% whereas older alumni reported their expectations were at least “Exceeded” at a lower rate of 56.52%. A large difference was found with those alumni that used their personal funds as compared to those that used employer funds to pay for their investment. Those that used personal funds reported their expectations were at least “Exceeded” at 79.31% where those that used employer funds reported at 60.60%.

Alumni overwhelmingly indicated that the program was at least “Probably yes” worth their overall investment at 93.24%. Dhanakumar, Rossing, Campbell (1996), Diem and Nikola (2005), and Lamm, Carter, Lamm (2016) all found the majority of program participants had rated the programs highly regarding being worthwhile or worth investments. Females believed that participation was at least “probably yes” worth their investment at a higher rate of males at 97.95% whereas males reported 84.00%. Wall, Pettibone, and Kelsey (2005) found that women

indicated a more positive disposition compared to males when it came to overall program participation. Alumni that utilized personal funds indicated at a rate of 100% that the program was at least “Probably yes” worth their overall investment while those that used employer funds reported at a lower rate of 87.87%.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 Recruitment

Most of the alumni were cognizant of the financial pressures of keeping the RULE program functional and identified that successful recruitment of participants would help to sustain the RULE program. Most of the alumni were recruited from either a member of a current class or an alumnus of the program. Alumni recruitment needs to continue, and current classes and alumni should be further encouraged to recruit candidates to the RULE program. A few other alumni suggested that greater outreach be done to recruit from the local or county leadership programs that are actively occurring across the state as this could provide a ready “pool” of qualified candidates. Wall, Pettibone, and Kelsey (2005) found that as the federal government has shifted many responsibilities locally for programs and services, it is imperative that local leaders are being provided with leadership education opportunities.

Horner (1984) over three decades noted that the key to agricultural leadership program success would be recruiting the highest of quality candidates with proven leadership credentials and the potential for growth. Greater outreach to local Farm Bureaus for recruitment and increased utilization of local Extension offices for recruitment and communication avenues such

as local press releases and other forms of outreach to their stakeholders should also be utilized. Horner (1984) also recognized that wide-spread promotion would also be essential to growing agricultural leadership programs and to achieve diversity.

Realizing that budgetary constraints are an issue alumni suggested that the program attains an intern that is majoring in marketing or communications to not only help with marketing the program but to also communicate with alumni on a regular basis. Communication should be done through a better social media presence as when a prospective candidate searches for the RULE program there is the official website but not necessarily up to date information put up either by participants or alumni. The intern could also coordinate or at least take the time to write up press releases and release them to the various news outlets or local Extension offices.

5.3.2 Program Modification and Improvement

Three of the interviewed alumni stated and it was suggested twice by survey participants that they would like to see a larger international component for the program. National/International Relations was also one of the top-ranked program areas that survey respondents wanted to learn more about at 17.57% identifying further interest. Once again realizing that financial constraints are an issue and that not everyone has a passport an optional summer Study Institute in Canada could help to fill that void. Another suggestion was made for the RULE program to foster an exchange program with other agricultural leadership programs in other states. Other alumni also suggested encouraging alumni to participate in ILAC as a way to gain international experience and to further grow their leadership skills and leadership network after exiting the RULE program. Carter and Rudd (2000) found that a second phase of continued education was needed for agricultural leadership programs after participants left the program. The RULE program

could help with fostering interest and facilitating logistics for alumni that were interested in taking on this international focus.

Governance, one of the hallmarks of the RULE program, was also identified by both interviewed alumni and by 12.16% of the survey respondents as a component of the program that either they would like to learn more about or see modified in some way. More interaction with public officials was also cited six times by alumni to improve program effectiveness. One suggestion is that as opposed to simply having legislators and state officials at Study Institutes that participants should be compelled to make more proactive contact with their local legislators at the local, county, or state level. By doing this program, participants can foster a relationship with their elected officials that will go beyond completion of the RULE program and hopefully further their advocacy initiatives.

Three of the interviewees and the most identified program area on the survey that alumni would have liked to have learned about was Economic Development/Tourism at 20.27%. Three of the survey respondents also stated they would have liked to have learned more about rural issues besides simply agriculture and two other indicated that they wanted to take a closer look at communities that were visited. Some of the Study Institutes do go to manufacturing sites and invite local economic and community development officials in to speak, but it appears as though alumni would like to see more of this happen during the program. One of the interviewees did state that they “found the agricultural component to be beneficial but would have liked to have learned more about the industry around the state.”

Two of the survey respondents also suggested that the RULE program should include an individual project that includes community development locally or with another member of their class that is in their area to further develop confidence and leadership skills. Kaufman and

Carter (2005) in their study also determined that there should be a project component in the agricultural leadership programs. They suggested that participants should design and implement action plans in order to take the next step in leadership education towards application.

The issue of healthcare was also identified by a few of the interviewed alumni and 8.11% of the survey respondents as a program area that they would like to learn more about. More emphasis on healthcare is something that should be looked at closer as this has become not only an economic issue but also a social issue as of late. Diem and Nikola (2005) stated that it is important that the agricultural leadership programs address issues that are practical and relevant to participants. The RULE program could recruit either professional from the industry or Penn State faculty well versed in the topic to provide unbiased research on the subject of healthcare or any other topic that is of significant interest at the time. Other alumni suggested that instead of having a large amount of speakers and activities that these should be reduced to allow for a more in-depth study of critical issues.

A different tier of the program was also a suggestion that came out of the interviews with alumni. Some of the interviewed alumni suggested making the application process more selective to attract only those that are looking for higher-level skills. A few suggested that the program should be more rigorous and geared for a higher level of leadership studies as opposed to soft skills such as public speaking. The aggregate data from this study also shows that in some instances those that had higher education levels, higher income levels, or that were older rated the program lower than those with lower educational attainment, lower income levels, or that were younger. This does suggest that a different tier of programming could be beneficial. Whent and Leising (1992) and Wall, Pettibone, and Kelsey (2005) in their studies found similar results when they looked at differences in aggregate data related to demographics.

Six alumni that were surveyed also suggested that there should be more objective exercises and presentations as opposed to subjective. According to the survey leadership studies was also identified by 10.81% as a program component that they would like to learn more about. A greater emphasis on leadership principles was also suggested three times on the survey as a program component that should be improved for greater program effectiveness. Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016) also suggested that besides leadership principles and theory participants should also be directed on how to take on and encouraged to take on greater leadership roles in their communities.

One major theme that came out of the curriculum improvement line of questioning is that alumni would have preferred higher-level assignments and projects that are more rigorous. Other alumni stated that they would have liked to have greater direction and feedback when it came to completing assignments. One of the big assignments that is undertaken while in the RULE program is the Individual Learning Contract (ILC). These should be more rigorous with more accountability attached to them. An opportunity here could be for encouraging participants to take on a leadership role within their local communities or at a professional level. Kaufman and Carter (2005) stated that these types of activities would not only add to participant civic engagement but also the application of leadership skills. Three of the interviewees strongly encouraged that these goals should be driven more towards professional change as opposed to personal.

Public speaking is a major component of the RULE program and interviewed alumni stated along with three of those surveyed that they would like to see more rigorous speaking opportunities. Whent and Leising (1992) also stated that instead of lectures and short speaking assignments the participants should be engaged in deeper discussions with differing viewpoints

to further develop communication skills. Speaking assignments should be more intensive and could include participants debating sensitive topics as to prepare them for having such conversations in their professional and personal lives.

Another important suggestion that was made by three alumni for improvement of the RULE program is for the program itself to solicit suggestions from the sponsors who are generally employers to learn what they would like to see as part of the curriculum. Black and Earnest (2009) also suggested that input should be attained from stakeholders, funders, and program sponsors to determine the outcomes they would like to see and whether or not they are satisfied with the product they are receiving. According to the survey, 44.59% of the participants had their investment in the RULE program paid for by a sponsor. Arguably, this makes the sponsors one of the most important stakeholders and the RULE program would want to ensure their sustainable commitment in the program.

5.3.3 Alumni Engagement

Alumni engagement was a topic that all of the interviewees and survey respondents were offered an opportunity to discuss or provide recommendations. The data on this issue contained a significant amount of discussion and recommendations from alumni. Without asking directly about alumni engagement eight of the survey respondents suggested continued opportunities for alumni after graduation, which was the highest ranked suggestion. Most of the interviewees also agreed that there needed to be more alumni engagement. Carter and Rudd (2000) stated that alumni need to be engaged in order to continue to learn and develop and should be involved with the program whether it is through educational activities or formal memberships on associations and boards. While participants are still enrolled in the program, they need to understand that

there are some expectations even after they leave the program. These expectations include recruiting for the program, participating in alumni events and opportunities, and helping with the sustainability of the RULE program through development efforts.

For alumni to be able to take part in this active role, these possibilities must first exist on a regular basis. Six of the interviewees identified that they believed that there ought to be some alumni function that should occur on a regular basis. Survey results confirmed this desire with 18 suggesting that there should be a yearly/bi-yearly educational reunion for alumni. Another 13 indicated that there should be regional reunions with current Study Institutes. These could be either educational events or networking events or preferably both. It was also suggested that successful alumni or a panel of alumni speak at Study Institutes about their successful leadership journeys. Another suggestion offered by six of the surveyed alumni was that perhaps a Penn State professor for a fee could provide continuing education for alumni could provide a class.

Communication with alumni was also a weakness identified by alumni. Interviewees and survey respondents' desired contact through either an e-newsletter or a social media page geared towards alumni. An idea posed by four survey respondents was that in these communications there could be alumni updates that would allow other alumni to see their colleague's leadership paths. Whent and Leising (1992) also found that alumni desired more communication between the programs and themselves along with current participants in the programs. When it comes to inviting alumni to Study Institutes, they would also prefer either a phone call but understanding the reality of time a personal email would do as opposed to a blanket email to the Listserve. To garner more participation, it was also suggested that a schedule for prospective alumni events be released at the beginning of the year or at least months ahead of time as schedules build up especially on the weekends.

Most of the alumni that made suggestions in regards to alumni engagement knew there would be a cost to engagement and that the cost would most likely fall upon the alumni. Alumni that were interviewed seemed to have few problems with covering that cost and possibly giving a donation to the program as well as part of it the alumni event. Development efforts was also a key theme brought up by the interviewees and that sharing with alumni the current funding situation and appealing to them for funds should be an ongoing effort to help foster the sustainability of the RULE program. A suggestion made by a few of the survey respondents was that there should be a portal that would allow for online donations and online alumni dues payment.

5.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

An important part of assessing agricultural leadership programs is not just finding out what the participants learned or believe they learned by participating in the programs. Stakeholders, funders, and colleagues of program participants should also be consulted to assess whether or not they found the program to have been positively beneficial to program participants. Russon and Reinelt (2004) and Black and Earnest (2009) also discovered that there is a need to delve more deeply into program outcomes long after participants leave the programs and a valuable source of information would be the people that alumni work with on a regular basis.

The aggregate data does show a difference in educational outcomes, program satisfaction, and return on expectations when demographic data is taken into account. Studies such as Wall, Pettibone, and Kelsey (2005) and Whent and Leising (1992) also found differences in reporting based on education levels, income levels, and age. What the expectations and needs of the

different demographic and socioeconomic grouping should be assessed to address their respective needs better so that they are experiencing the desired level of growth.

As part of a consortium of agricultural leadership programs that share common educational objectives, a shared evaluation instrument should be developed to offer a longitudinal study. This evaluation instrument could measure whether educational objectives were met and also provide impact data. This impact data could include number and type of leadership roles occupied by alumni and types of projects that alumni were involved in either professionally or personally in their communities. The evaluation tool could also provide an opportunity for alumni suggestions for curriculum improvement and suggestions for further alumni engagement. Carter and Rudd (2000), Black and Earnest (2009), and Lamm, Carter, and Lamm (2016) also noted that such an evaluation tool would benefit programs not only for the sake of evaluation but also to establish legitimacy in the tight budget cycles many Extension programs find themselves in.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a summary of results and recommendations based on an assessment study of the RULE program. Semi-structured interviews of ten alumni were used to provide qualitative data while 74 completed Qualtrics surveys were utilized to provide quantitative data. Aggregate data relative to demographic information was included along with literature sources that confirmed many of the findings. This study has shown that the RULE program is not only meeting its curriculum objectives but it's exceeding them.

Perhaps the clearest understanding of the success of the RULE program is by revisiting a couple of data points found in the survey. All of the participants in the survey found the RULE program to be at least “Slightly Effective” in providing leadership skills for personal and professional development while 70.27% believed it either to be “Very Effective” or “Extremely Effective.” Over half or 55.41% of the survey respondents have seen an increase in their leadership responsibilities since completing the RULE program. Black and Earnest (2009) also found that program participation positively changed the majority of participants in their study.

When asked whether the RULE program was worth their overall investment 68.92% answered “Definitely Yes” and another 24.32% answered “Probably Yes” for a total of 93.24%. When asked whether the RULE program had exceeded their expectation five of the interviewees stated that it did. Three other interviewees found that it had equaled their expectations. When it came to the survey respondents, 67.57% reported that the RULE program had at least exceeded their expectations with another 24.32% indicating that it had equaled their expectations. Survey respondents also reported at a rate of 79.73% that the RULE program was at least “Very” important to continue.

As the researcher of this study and a current RULE program participant, I can clearly see that the program is going strong, but every educational program has room for improvement. The RULE program is currently making inroads into some of the more urban population centers of Pennsylvania, and this initiative needs to continue. It needs to continue for several reasons including enrollment and diversity of participants. Diversity brings differing viewpoints that allow participants to grow in ways that they might not have imagined. Another practical reason is that these alumni will give the RULE program a voice in areas where it may not have had one previously which is essential as the state budget becomes tighter and tighter.

The curriculum has an agricultural component which is valuable. I would challenge the RULE program to still focus on agriculture but include what might be considered “non-traditional” agriculture. Recently, at a Study Institute, a speaker presented on rooftop gardens. The enthusiasm and interest that came from the program participants about this topic was undeniable. By including more “non-traditional” agriculture into the curriculum more interest would be generated in the more urban centers and possibly from a younger generation that has taken an interest in such topics.

An effort for creating a higher level program for those that are not at the beginning of their leadership journey is needed. There is an understanding amongst alumni that the diversity of differing levels of leadership within the program is beneficial but many would have liked to have been challenged at a more rigorous level. Efforts should be made to make assignments and speaking opportunities more challenging so that those with experience can grow further and model for those participants that have less experience.

Alumni are also willing to be engaged and want to be involved. Alumni appear to be some of the most active recruiters for the program but they want to be engaged in other ways as well. Alumni stated that they would like to take part either in Study Institutes that are already occurring or in educational and networking events of their own. Advantages of having a strong alumni network not only include recruiting but also advocacy and possible development efforts for the program

The RULE program is effective and as evidenced by this study support remains high from its vast alumni base, which is approaching 650. The RULE program does need to work on broadening its curriculum to address other rural concerns besides agriculture further, cultivate

diverse participants not only in the rural areas but also in the urban areas, and further engage its alumni network.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL



University of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board

3500 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 383-1480
(412) 383-1508 (fax)
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

Memorandum

To: Joseph Conklin
From: IRB Office
Date: 10/11/2016
IRB#: [PRO16080192](#)
Subject: Rural-Urban Leadership (RULE) Program Evaluation

The above-referenced project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. Based on the information provided, this project meets all the necessary criteria for an exemption, and is hereby designated as "exempt" under section

45 CFR 46.101(b)(1)

Figure A.1: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL FROM RULE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Sent on January 26th, 2017

Dear Leader—

Happy New Year! I wanted to give you a heads up to expect an email from Joe Conklin, a RULE XVI scholar working on his EdD in leadership. There is an immense benefit in benchmarking program impact, and you are one of the select groups of classes identified for this study.

I took this 25 multiple choice qualtrics survey myself and even when I paused to ponder, it took me about 10 minutes.

As a reminder, RULE has a new website, RULE's Round-Up <https://sites.psu.edu/ruleneewsletter/>. We are mid-way through class XVI, a robust cohort of 25 leaders.

There is abundance in recalling your RULE experience.

Best of blue skies,

jd

APPENDIX C

INTRODUCTORY SURVEY EMAIL

Sent of January 26th, 2017

Dear Rule Alumni,

My name is Joseph Conklin, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh, a member of RULE XVI (Shining Sixteen), and a Penn State Extension employee. My leadership journey took a dramatic turn once given the opportunity to enroll in the RULE program a year ago. After about nine months in the program, I decided to change the focus of my dissertation from an assessment of 4-H programming to an assessment of the RULE program.

The purpose of this research study is to assess the RULE program from the perspective of its alumni. We are continually working towards improving our programs. The best way we have of learning about the outcomes of our programs is by asking alumni like you to share your thoughts and opinions.

At the end of this email, I have included a link to a Qualtrics survey that is hosted by the University of Pittsburgh. I am asking that you click on the link and complete the survey. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete and can be accessed by using a PC or any mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time. The questionnaire is entirely anonymous, and so your responses will not be identifiable in any way. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study, nor are there any direct benefits to you.

By taking a few minutes to share your thoughts and opinions about the RULE program, you will help us a great deal in assessing the program. I hope you find the completing the questionnaire simple and I look forward to your honest feedback. The more alumni that complete the survey, the better our statistical picture and the more understanding we will gain about the program.

Qualtrics Link for RULE Assessment Survey:

https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5pRspBPgbIhs28d

If you have any questions about this survey or have any issues accessing it, I would be happy to assist. I can be reached via my cell at 412-290-5858 or email at juc50@psu.edu.

Thanks,

Joseph Conklin

Doctoral Candidate and RULE XVI Fellow

APPENDIX D

EMAIL REMINDER

Sent on January 31st, 2017

Good Afternoon RULE Alumni,

Many of you have completed the questionnaire in regards to the RULE program, and for that, I will forever be grateful. I do still need some more participants so that I can meet the required threshold for the research study.

Through this research, I am hoping to gain a better understanding of the outcomes of the RULE program such as what knowledge or skills you may have acquired and how the program can be improved.

The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete and can be accessed by using a PC or any mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet. All of your answers are anonymous and confidential. Please click on the link below to access the survey:

Qualtrics Link for RULE Assessment Survey:

https://pitt.col.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5pRspBPgbIhs28d

On the evening of Friday, February 3rd at 11:59 pm the survey will be shut down so that I can begin the process of analyzing the data.

Again, I greatly appreciate your assistance in completing this survey. If you have any questions about this survey or have any issues accessing it, I would be happy to assist you. I can be reached via my cell at 412-290-5858 or email at juc50@psu.edu.

Thanks,

Joseph Conklin

Doctoral Candidate and RULE XVI Fellow

APPENDIX E

INTRODUCTORY INTERVIEW EMAIL

Sent on December 6th, 2017

Dear Rule Alumni,

My name is Joseph Conklin, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh, a member of RULE XVI (Shining Sixteen), and a Penn State Extension employee. My leadership journey took a dramatic turn once I was given the opportunity to enroll in the RULE program a year ago. After about nine months in the program, I decided to completely change the focus of my dissertation from an evaluation of 4-H programming to an evaluation of the RULE program.

The purpose of this research study is to evaluate the RULE program from the perspective of its alumni. We are continually working towards improving our programs. The best way we have of learning about the outcomes of our programs is by asking alumni like you to share your thoughts and opinions.

In consultation with the Director of the RULE program, you were identified as an alumnus that could assist in my evaluation of the RULE program by participating in a face-to-face interview. The interview to discuss your experience with the RULE program should take approximately 45 minutes. The interview will take place at a location that is convenient for you. Additionally, the interview will be audiotaped to ensure that all responses are recorded.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time. Any information obtained during the interview which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be included in the project or other documents. The data will be stored on university servers and password enabled computers. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study, nor are there any direct benefits to you.

By taking the time to share your thoughts and opinions about the RULE program, you will help us a great deal in evaluating the program. If you are able to assist me with this research, please respond by replying to this email indicating your intention. Also, please include a telephone number; so that I may contact you to set up the date, time, and location of the interview.

If you have any questions about this research study or the interview feel free to contact me. I can be reached via my office phone at 724-228-6881 or email at juc50@psu.edu.

Thanks,

Joseph Conklin

Doctoral Candidate and RULE XVI Fellow

APPENDIX F

LOGISTICAL TELEPHONE SCRIPT

Telephone Script to determine the logistics of the Interview

P.I.: Good morning/afternoon/evening, (name of research participant):

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project intended to evaluate the RULE program. My objective is to identify concepts learned by participants, what alumni valued, and what suggestions they offer for program improvement for the RULE program. Do you have any questions about the research project or what is required of you as a participant?

Participant: (if they have questions, I will answer them if not I will proceed)

P.I.: I'm calling you to find out your availability the week of Monday, (month, date) so that we can schedule a 45-60 minute block of time for the completion of the interview and determine the location for the interview.

Participant: (their response)

P.I.: (my response will be dependent on their response). This (date and time) will work for me.

Can we conduct the interview at your home or would you rather we meet at the _____ county extension office, coffee shop, etc?

Participant: (their response)

P.I.: (my response will be dependent on their response) Great, I will meet you at _____ on (date and time).

Participant: (their response)

P.I.: (name of research participant), I look forward to meeting with you to discuss your experiences as a participant in the RULE program. At this time, do you have any questions about the research project or what is required of you as a participant?

Participant: (their response)

P.I.: The day before our scheduled interview, I will give you a call to remind you of the logistics of our interview. Should your schedule change and not allow you to participate on (date, time, and location), please call me office phone at 724-228-6881. We will then reschedule another date, time and location.

Participant: (their response)

P.I.: (name of research participant), I look forward to meeting with you on (date, time, and location) and again, I want to thank you for assisting us in a research project intended to identify concepts learned by participants, what alumni valued, and what suggestions they offer for program improvement for the RULE program by participants the RULE program.

Participant: (their response)

APPENDIX G

QUALTRICS SURVEY

Q1

Please rate your growth in the following area that you believe you experienced due to your participation in RULE:

Awareness of issues facing agriculture/agribusiness

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q2

Please rate your growth in the following area that you believe you experienced due to your participation in RULE:

Public issue awareness beyond agricultural concerns

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q3

Please rate your growth in the following area that you believe you experienced due to your participation in RULE:

Process and procedures surrounding policy making and legislative process

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q4

Please rate your growth in the following area that you believe you experienced due to your participation in RULE:

Connecting with government officials

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q5

Please rate your growth in the following area that you believe you experienced due to your participation in RULE:

Networking with other leaders in your community and profession

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q6

Please rate your growth in the following area that you believe you experienced due to your participation in RULE:

Confidence in public speaking

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot

- A great deal

Q7

Please rate your growth in the following area that you believe you experienced due to your participation in RULE:

Taking on a leadership role in a group activity

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q8

Of the 10 program areas rank the top three which you found to be the most valuable in regards to your leadership trajectory after RULE with 1 being the most valuable.

- Agriculture
- Communication Skills
- Culture
- Economic Development/Tourism
- Governance
- Group Process
- Health Care
- Leadership Studies
- National/International Relations
- Professional/Personal Development

Q9

Of the 10 program areas denote the one that you would have liked to have learned more about

- Agriculture
- Communication Skills
- Culture
- Economic Development/Tourism
- Governance
- Group Process

- Health Care
- Leadership Studies
- National/International Relations
- Professional/Personal Development

Q10

Before starting the RULE program did you believe that you would experience more growth personally or professionally?

- Personally
- Professionally

Q11

After completing the RULE program do you believe that you experienced more growth personally or professionally?

- Personally
- Professionally

Q12

How effective do you believe the RULE program was in providing you with leadership skills for your personal and professional development?

- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

Q13

To what extent did the RULE program increase your aspirations for future leadership positions?

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q14

Since completing the RULE program to what extent have you experienced an increase in leadership responsibilities?

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q15

To what extent did the RULE program meet your expectations?

- Far short of expectations
- Short of expectations
- Equals expectations
- Exceeds expectations
- Far exceeds expectations

Q16

Do you believe that participation in RULE was worth your overall investment?

- Definitely not
- Probably not
- Might or might not
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

Q17

Please indicate how important you believe it is to continue the RULE program.

- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important

Q18

Reflecting back on the RULE program, what aspect did you value the most that helped to contribute to your personal and/or professional growth?

Q19

What would you suggest the RULE program include in order to improve the effectiveness of the program?

Q20

What would you suggest the RULE program do in order to further engage alumni?

Q21

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

Q22

What was your age at time of program enrollment?

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70+

Q23

What would you identify as your personal yearly income before taxes?

- \$0-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$59,999
- \$60,000-\$79,999
- \$80,000-\$99,999
- More than \$100,000

Q24

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree
- High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree in college (2-year)
- Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- Master's degree

- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD)

Q25

Each RULE participant is asked to make an annual contribution towards their personal investment in their leadership education while enrolled in RULE. How was your investment paid for?

- Personal Funds
- Employer Funds
- Scholarship
- Other

APPENDIX H

RESEARCH AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Questions

1. What did alumni of RULE perceive they gained from participation in the program?
2. What aspects of the RULE program experience did alumni find to be the most valuable?
3. What would alumni of RULE suggest to improve the program?

Interview Questions:

1. There are numerous leadership programs at the local, state, and national level. Why did you choose to invest in RULE? **RQ-1/RQ-2**
2. The agricultural component included within RULE is one of the aspects that makes it unique when compared to other leadership programs. Could you tell me what you learned about agriculture as a result of participation in RULE? **RQ-1**
3. RULE has many expected outcomes that are supposed to help its participants grow both personally and professionally. How have you applied what you have learned in RULE to your life both personally and professionally? **RQ-1**
4. RULE had 10 focus areas that make up its curriculum. Which of the areas did you find to be the most valuable and why? **RQ-1**
5. For many leadership programs such as RULE we hear of ‘return on investment’ which includes mainly time and money but we seldom hear of “return on expectations”. What was your ROE based upon your experience in RULE? **RQ-2**
6. What would you suggest the program include or remove in order to improve the curriculum? **RQ-3**

Secondary Interview Questions:

1. When you initially signed up for the RULE program, did you expect to have more personal or professional growth? **RQ-1**
2. Did the RULE program act as a catalyst for personal or professional development? Could you provide examples? **RQ-1/RQ-2**
3. Out of the 10 focus areas of the RULE curriculum, what would you suggest for program modification? **RQ-3**
4. What would you suggest the RULE program do in order to improve alumni relations and involvement? **RQ-3**

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