

**MOTIVATED TO LEAD: A LONGITUDINAL ASSESSMENT
OF STUDENTS ATTENDING A
CHRISTIAN LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE**

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Introduction

Leadership development is one of the most frequently mentioned goals articulated by CCCU institutions. In 1996, the Association for Christians in Student Development funded a survey of council schools to develop a “leadership development profile” of CCCU colleges. The survey, by design and results, suggests that CCCU leadership development programs focus almost exclusively on skill development.¹ This is not surprising since the emphasis in the larger leadership movement in the culture, both secular and Christian, is on leadership style/behavior/skills. For example, in the early and mid-nineties alone, more than 125 books were published on Christian leadership and a cursory review suggests they overwhelmingly focused on leadership style/behavior/skills. Maybe this is to be expected in a “how to do it” society.

Of course behavior and skill development are extremely important. But what about those students who lack the *motivation* to lead? Are we, as educators, assuming that most Christian students come to our schools already motivated to lead and that all we need to do is provide the training? As far as I know, no prior research has been done on the motivation to lead among incoming students in our CCCU schools.² Nor do we know whether that motivation is affected by their four-year educational experience. If leadership development for our students is really our goal, then I propose we step back and evaluate our assumption—that Christian students come to CCCU schools motivated and ready to be educated/trained for leadership. To test the assumption and to determine whether the college experience is affecting the motivation to lead, I conducted a longitudinal study of the class of 1999 of one CCCU college. This paper is a report of that study.

Research Instrument

The Miner Sentence Completion Scale (MSCS) was used to measure the motivation to lead among college students. This instrument was developed more than thirty years ago by psychologist Dr. John B. Miner as an outgrowth of his research on role motivation theory. He had identified a handful of key roles that individuals must exercise in order to be effective as a leader/manager and was interested in developing an instrument to measure a person’s motivation to actually exercise those roles.³

He began with a projective sentence completion test and over the years, through numerous validation studies, modified the instrument into a multiple choice instrument with forty sentence stems. Reliability and validity has remained constant. Literally hundreds of research studies have been conducted using this instrument in both profit and non-profit organizations. Comparative studies in almost twenty different countries have also been conducted.⁴

The MSCS includes a 40 item multiple choice scale. Among the 40 items are seven subscales. Each subscale is composed of five survey questions (five are not scored). The subscales are intended to measure the component variables of a role-motivation theory of leadership effectiveness.⁵ See Table 1 for subscale identification and description.

Table 1
Subscales of the Miner Sentence Completion Scale and Their Interpretation

Subscale	Interpretation of Positive Responses
Authority Figures	A desire to meet leadership role requirements in terms of positive relationships with superiors.
Competitive Games	A desire to engage in competition with peers involving games or sports and thus meet leadership role requirements.
Competitive Situations	A desire to engage in competition with peers involving occupational or work-related activities and thus meet leadership role requirements.
Assertive Role	A desire to behave in an active and assertive manner involving activities which in this society are often viewed as predominantly masculine and thus to meet leadership role requirements.
Imposing Wishes	A desire to tell others what to do and to utilize sanctions in influencing others, thus indicating a capacity to fulfill leadership role requirements in relationships with subordinates.
Standing Out from Group	A desire to assume a distinctive position of a unique and highly visible nature in a manner which is role-congruent for leadership.
Routine Administrative Functions	A desire to meet leadership role requirements regarding activities often associated with managerial work which are of a day-to-day administrative nature.

Sample and Study Design

The longitudinal study was conducted at one of the larger colleges among the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). In the fall of 1995, during freshmen orientation, the entire freshmen class (more than 600) was surveyed using the MSCS. Four years later, during the spring of 1999, seniors were surveyed again using the same instrument.

In addition to completing the MSCS, the seniors were asked to complete a questionnaire gathering a significant amount of demographic information. The second survey was conducted through campus mail with one follow-up notice to non-respondents. One hundred ninety three surveys were returned in 1999, of which 188

MSCS surveys were usable. In just a very few cases demographic information was missing so a few of the subset comparisons have fewer than 188 in the sample.

Given normal attrition of the senior class, a good number of transfer students who would not have been included in the initial survey, and it being the spring of their senior year when surveys in campus mail are easily tossed, a response rate of over 30% seemed quite good.

Social security numbers were used to identify respondents so comparisons could be made between the 1995 and 1999 surveys.

Results

From 1995 to 1999, the Total Score for the entire sample population changed slightly in the positive direction, but the change was not statistically significant. This means that overall, students at this Christian college did not change over the four years in their motivation to lead as measured by the MSCS. See Table 2.

There was significant change in three subscales, however. Being willing to *Assume an Assertive Role* changed in a positive direction as did the willingness to *Stand Out From the Group*. A desire to *Meet Routine Administrative Functions* also changed significantly over four years although in the negative direction.

It should be pointed out that *Assuming an Assertive Role* had the lowest mean score among the seven subscales in the 1995 data. And while there was significant change in the positive direction from 1995 to 1999, the subscale mean in 1999 is still relatively low. On the other hand, *Standing Out From the Group* had the highest mean score in 1995 and still changed significantly in the positive direction from 1995 to 1999.

Table 2
Comparison of Total Sample Between 1995 and 1999

Measure	1995 (n = 188)	1999 (n = 188)	<i>t</i>
Total Score	-.16	.15	-.74
Authority Figures	.08	-.05	1.07
Competitive Games	.36	.36	-.04
Competitive Situations	-.89	-.94	.33
Assertive Role	-.90	-.56	-2.24*
Imposing Wishes	.23	.21	-.17
Standing Out From Group	.77	1.27	-3.63**
Routine Administrative Functions	.65	.24	2.70**

*p < .05, **p < .01, two tailed

The data was also analyzed by gender. As might be expected, males had a higher mean Total Score than females in both 1995 and 1999, and while both males and females changed in the positive direction between 1995 and 1999, the changes were not statistically significant. See Table 3.

The subscales, however, show some difference in gender response. There was no significant change in any of the subscales for males, although it should be noted that several changed in the negative direction. Among females, however, there was significant change in three of the seven subscales—*Assertive Role*, *Standing Out From the Group*, and *Routine Administrative Functions*. These are the same three subscales where there was significant change in the total sample. The changes were also in the same direction as in the total sample. Since the males did not change, it appears that the change among females accounts for the changes in the entire population noted above.

Table 3
Gender Comparison 1995 and 1999

Measure	Male (n = 45)			Female (n = 142)		
	1995	1999	t	1995	1999	t
Total Score	1.56	1.91	-.39	-.73	-.45	-.59
Authority Figure	.18	.13	.19	.07	-.10	1.22
Competitive Games	.58	.56	.07	.26	.29	-.20
Competitive Situations	-.56	-.49	-.19	-1.03	-1.10	.45
Assertive Role	.13	-.09	.69	-1.23	-.72	-2.93**
Imposing Wishes	.13	.11	.09	-.35	-.31	-.30
Standing Out from Group	.93	1.36	-1.51	.71	1.23	-3.22**
Routine Administrative Functions	.16	.33	-.51	.81	.25	3.32**

**p < .01, two tailed

The total sample size was large enough to analyze data for several of the larger academic majors on campus. See Table 4. With the exception of Biology, which had the highest Total Score in 1995 and then dropped slightly, the other four majors changed in the positive direction. Even though Biology majors dropped in their Total Score over the four years they still had the highest mean Total Score. It is interesting to note that Biology and Elementary Education/Early Childhood Education had the highest mean Total Scores followed by Business and Family Studies. Nursing had the lowest mean Total Score, significantly lower than the rest and the only major with a negative Total Score. There was no significant change among any of the five majors over the four year period.

It should be pointed out that the sample size for each major was rather small, possibly contributing to the lack of statistical significance. While Elementary Education/Early Childhood Education changed from -.57 to 1.48, this was not statistically significant because the sample size was only fourteen. Among the seven subscales for all

of the majors (35 in total), there were only two statistically significant changes, both in the upward direction. Those were: *Standing Out From the Group* (among business majors) and *Assertive Role* (among elementary education majors). But in terms of the big picture, there was essentially little change over the four years among the different academic majors represented in the study.

Table 4
Comparing MSCS Total Score by Major Between 1995 and 1999

Major	<u>1995</u>	<u>1999</u>
Business (<i>n</i> = 23)	.74	1.09
Nursing (<i>n</i> = 19)	-1.95	-1.84
Family Studies (<i>n</i> = 18)	-1.00	.47
Biology (<i>n</i> = 18)	1.93	1.80
Elem./Early Childhood (<i>n</i> = 14)	-.57	1.48

Students were also queried about leadership roles they had played in high school. As might be expected, those with high school leadership experience scored higher than those without on the Total Score during Freshmen Orientation in 1995. In fact, those differences were quite significant: 1.13 on the Total Score for those with high school leadership experience compared to -2.20 for those without high school leadership. See Table 5.

But what was surprising was that those with leadership experience in high school actually had a lower Total Score four years later. Something during the four year period from 1995 to 1999 actually caused their desire to lead to drop. Although not statistically significant, the Total Score was actually lower. On the other hand, those without leadership experience in high school changed quite dramatically in a positive direction even though their overall Total Score in 1999 was still quite low.

Table 5
High School Leadership Experience and Scores on the MSCS

	<u>1995 Total Scale</u>	<u>1999 Total Scale</u>
With High School Experience (<i>n</i> = 113)	1.13	1.07
Without High School Experience (<i>n</i> = 72)	-2.20	-1.20

In addition, twenty two students in the sample had a formal college class on leadership sometime during their four year experience. Those who had this class showed a slight increase in the Total Score, but it was not statistically significant, nor were there any significant changes among the seven subscales. It would seem that this intentional formal class on leadership did not impact the students' motivation to lead.

Students were also asked whether they had read a book on leadership during their four years at college. Presumably, those in a leadership class would have read a leadership book; many others had also. While 78 of the 187 in the sample said they had read at least one book on leadership, there was no significant change among those students in the Total Score over the four years.

Some have said that participating in service projects or service-learning courses has an impact on leadership. A recent study by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), for instance, makes that claim.⁶ What they mean by “impact on leadership” is a bit unclear. However, in this study we found that participating in a service project or being part of an outreach ministry team (another service-oriented activity) had no significant impact on students’ desire to lead over the four year period.

Others have said that participating in sports, particularly intercollegiate sports, builds leadership capacity. This study revealed, however, that there was no significant change in desire to lead over the four years for both athletes and non-athletes. It is interesting to note that the intercollegiate athletes as a group had a higher Total Score in the MSCS than any other subgroup in the study. As freshmen, they measured 3.11 on the Total Score, and as seniors they scored 3.18. This is compared to -.16 (1995) and .15 (1999) for the total sample. Intercollegiate athletes came to college already with a strong desire to lead. College simply did not change them much.

Finally, seniors were asked a simple self-reporting question—“do you perceive yourself to be a leader?” Interestingly, 137 of 188 answered “yes” even though their mean Total Scores were not very high (.76 in 1995 and 1.45 in 1999). Maybe most interesting is that those who did not perceive themselves as leaders showed very low Total Scores (-2.60 in 1995 and -3.29 in 1999) in the MSCS. *Their self report was accurately reflected in the projective instrument measuring their desire to lead.*

Conclusion

In this one longitudinal study at one CCCU college, it appears that students are not growing in their motivation to lead as measured by the composite Total Score of the MSCS. Although statistically significant change occurred among three of the seven subscales of the instrument, these changes were not large enough to impact the composite Total Score.

Of special interest are the gender differences. As reported above, males did not change on the composite score nor on any of the subscales, while females increased in three subscales. It would appear, then, that this college is doing a slightly better job enabling female students to grow in their motivation to lead than enabling male students to grow in their motivation to lead.

Given the attention in recent years to improving the self-image and confidence of females in the academic arena, the results of this study are consistent. It also suggests that

recent material documenting the dearth of leadership among fathers and the identity crisis being faced by men in the American culture, should be given more attention, even in our CCCU colleges.

Analysis by academic major or program was hindered by the small sample sizes of response by major. This was unfortunate as certain “trends” looked interesting even though they weren’t statistically significant. If the entire education class, for example, had been surveyed, would the large change observed in the small sample have been statistically significant? Education is essentially about learning to influence/teach others, so it would be very interesting if education programs are producing a significant increase in the motivation to lead among their students.

It is very interesting that nursing majors scored the lowest on the MSCS, relative to other majors. Nursing is generally portrayed as a “serving” profession. Does such an attitude diminish the nursing student’s sense of being influencers (exerting leadership) in the society they serve? And what does this say about the way we are presenting “servant leadership?” Are we separating “service” and “leadership” by presenting them dichotomistically rather than holistically?

Business students scored right in the middle among the five majors identified. As an academic discipline, the study of leadership is most likely to be found in business programs. And yet, whatever was taught related to leadership did not result in meaningful change among business students’ desire to lead.

The fact that no subgroup that was analyzed (those with high school leadership experience, those with intercollegiate athletic experience, those who had taken a leadership class, and those who participated in service activities) showed significant change in their desire to lead over the four years of college suggests that this CCCU college is not significantly impacting the motivation to lead of its students.

These overall findings are somewhat discouraging because most colleges of the CCCU state they are preparing future leaders. The college represented in this study says explicitly, “Our mission is to educate men and women...for lives of...leadership...in church and society.” Most Christian colleges make similar statements. This study, although limited to one college, suggests that we may not be motivating young men and women to be leaders; to be people of influence impacting the world for Christ.

The question might be raised as to whether the MSCS instrument measures the kind of leadership we espouse in CCCU colleges—servant leadership. If the instrument was measuring leadership style or behaviors, that might be more of an issue. But the instrument measures the desire to lead. And the fact that the reliability and validity of the instrument has remained constant for over 30 years, for both genders, and in various cultural settings, suggests the instrument has some universal application. It is currently the only instrument available to measure leadership motivation. To dismiss it too quickly because it is not a “Christian” instrument, might be a bit rash given its long and varied history of reliability.

Mark Troyer, Assistant Dean for Leadership Development at Asbury College, noted in his summary of the 1996 leadership development survey of council schools that most leadership development programs target the few students holding campus leadership positions and focus almost exclusively on skill development.⁷ Clearly, a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach is needed—one that considers motivational issues as well as the “how to” issues.

This study is only one study. It only measures the change in the motivation to lead of students at one CCCU school. But it suggests a possible weakness in leadership development endeavors since no significant change was observable in the desire or motivation to lead between the freshmen and senior year of these students. The study suggests more research is needed if we are to determine how to motivate our CCCU students to develop their fullest leadership potential.

ENDNOTES

¹ Mark J. Troyer, "Student Leadership Development: A Christian College Research Project and Discussion of Issues," Koinonia Spring 1997.

² A small, unpublished pilot study was done by the author in the early nineties to compare the motivation to lead between business majors at one CCCU college and business majors at two similar secular colleges. The results were not statistically significant, though in several subscales, the students from the CCCU school were substantially *less* motivated to lead than those in the two secular schools.

³ When the MCSC was developed in the late sixties and early seventies, "leadership" was not in vogue as it is today. Consequently, "management" was the term initially used by Miner. However, Miner himself writes in his recent book that "leadership is equated with the role of the manager" as he defines the role in his theory. And a closer look at the subscales of the instrument clearly reveal leadership characteristics as they are described today. See John B. Miner, Role Motivation Theories (New York: Routledge, 1993) 43.

⁴ The overall conclusions are that the motivation to lead in this country declined dramatically during the seventies, leveled out in the eighties, and has remained relatively constant (and low) in recent years. In comparative international studies, almost all countries show a significantly higher level of motivation to lead than do we in the United States. Miner, who has conducted much of the research himself, has concluded that we as a country face a leadership crisis both internally and comparatively as we confront a growing globally competitive market. Miner 238-261.

⁵ J.B. Miner, Studies in Management Education (Atlanta: Organizational Measurement Systems Press, 1965).

⁶ Referenced in "Service Learning Has Positive Impact on Key Student Learning and Diversity Outcomes," Diversity Spring/Summer 2000:20-21.

⁷ Troyer, Koinonia 4.