

- 1) John C. Ricketts, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Agricultural Teacher Education, University of Georgia, 110 Four Towers, Athens, GA 30602, [jcr@uga.edu](mailto:jcr@uga.edu), 706-542-8646
- 2) Student Leadership Practices of [state] FFA Members
- 3) Research
- 4) The purpose of this study was to assess the leadership practices of FFA members participating in a leadership development workshop known as the *Success Conference* in [state]. Although participants' most frequent leadership behaviors were *encouraging the heart* and *enabling others to act*, scores were lower than comparative normative data.
- 5) John is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication (ALEC) at the University of Georgia. He teaches and advises Agricultural Education and Master of Agricultural Leadership students. As a former high school teacher and football coach, he is most interested in research related to student achievement in school age youth. John feels that leadership development is a key variable in that achievement. John received his BS in Agricultural Education and MS in Vocational-Technical Education from Middle Tennessee State University, and he received his PhD in Agricultural Education and Communication from the University of Florida.
- 6) See next page.

## Introduction and Literature Review

Former President John F. Kennedy once stated, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." This rings true in State FFA Associations as agricultural educators seek to teach leadership via the vehicle of the FFA Leadership Development Events. In fact "the development of agricultural leadership skills has been one of the primary aims of the National FFA Organization since its inception in 1928" (Wingenbach & Kahler, 1997, p. 18). Preparing young people with the leadership skills that future employers seek could also be viewed as agricultural education's greatest task. This study seeks to determine if leadership is actually a part of an active FFA member's life.

Many competent agricultural education researchers have reported that leadership is learned in and through the FFA (Ricketts, 1982; Ricketts & Rudd, 2004; Townsend & Carter, 1983; Brannon, Holley, & Key, 1989; Dormody & Seevers, 1994). Townsend and Carter (1983) found FFA activity participation was positively correlated with the leadership of 12<sup>th</sup> grade agricultural education students (pp. 20-25). Similarly, Ricketts (1982) gathered research from 12<sup>th</sup> grade male students and found that FFA members from both superior and non-superior FFA chapters possessed significantly more leadership and personal development abilities than students not associated with agricultural education. Furthermore, in an attempt to predict Youth Leadership Life Skill Development, Dormody and Seevers (1994) found a weak, but positive relationship between participation in the FFA and students' Youth Leadership Life Skills Development. Also, Ricketts and Rudd (2004) determined that agricultural education and the FFA were the most influential constructs for leadership development.

As encouraging as many of these studies are for leadership educators, there seems to be limited clarity about what it means to have developed one's leadership skills and/or abilities. Stogdill (1974) summarized this lack of clarity by stating that, "there are almost as many definitions of leadership development as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (p. 259). Stogdill also surmised that leadership was defined as: personality or effectiveness of personality, the art of inducing compliance, the exercise of influence, a function of a set of acts or behavior, a form of persuasion, a set of acts or behavior, a power of relationship, an instrument of goal achievement, an effective interaction, a differentiated role, and the initiation of structure.

Many of Stogdill's descriptors of leadership are inherent in Kouzes and Posner's (1995) theory of leadership. According to Kouzes and Posner leaders are those who challenge people, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, set a good example, and encourage others to succeed. This study utilizes Kouzes' and Posner's (1998) *Student Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI) to describe the leadership practices of [state] FFA members participating in the "Success Conference," which was a leadership workshop sponsored by the [state] FFA Association.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study begins with the leadership practices research of Kouzes and Posner (1995). After 20 years of research with more than 60,000 respondents, Kouzes and Posner established five leadership practices that are omnipresent in the leaders they observed. As mentioned above, those leadership practices are *challenging the process*, *enabling others to act*, *inspiring a shared vision*, *encouraging the heart*, and *modeling the way*.

*Challenging the process* is about searching out challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve. It is also about experimenting, taking risks, and learning from accompanying mistakes. *Inspiring a shared vision* is about envisioning an uplifting and ennobling future as a leader, and enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes, and dreams. *Enabling others to act* is a leadership practice, which fosters collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust. This practice is also about strengthening people by giving power away, providing choice, developing competence, assigning critical tasks, and offering visible support. *Modeling the way* as a leader involves setting the example by behaving in ways that are consistent with shared values. A leader who models the way loves to achieve small wins that promote consistent progress and build commitment from followers. *Encouraging the heart* is a leadership practice that recognizes individual contributions to the success of every project. A leader who encourages the heart celebrates team accomplishments regularly (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 18).

According to Kouzes and Posner (1997), leadership practices are measured behaviors, not measures of IQ, personality type, or management skills (p. 5). Although a succinct conceptualization of what set of leadership behaviors are the “right” behaviors the LPI consistently shows that “The more frequently you demonstrate the behaviors included in the LPI, the more likely you will be seen as an effective leader” (p. 6). Specifically, participants who regularly exhibit LPI behaviors are seen as:

- Being more effective in meeting job-related demands
- Being more successful in representing their units to upper management
- Creating higher-performing teams
- Fostering loyalty and commitment
- Increasing motivational levels and willingness to work hard
- Reducing absenteeism, turnover, and dropout rates
- Possessing high degrees of personal credibility (p. 6).

Additionally, two separate empirical studies determined that the five leadership practices accounted for 65 (Posner & Brodsky, 1992) and 80 (Posner & Brodsky, 1994) percent of the variance in assessments of chapter presidents’ leadership effectiveness. Posner and Brodsky (1993) also found that students, who practiced the five leadership practices most often, as compared to those who engaged in them less often, viewed themselves as more effective leaders.

Researchers in agricultural and extension education have utilized the LPI to evaluate leadership behaviors as well. Rudd (2000) and Krill, Carter, and Williams (1997) along with other researchers have all used Kouzes' and Posners' leadership practices in their respective studies. Rudd analyzed the leadership styles of extension directors, and determined that these leaders self-reported that *enabling others to act* was their most frequent leadership behavior ( $M = 51.80$ ,  $SD = 4.30$ ) while *inspiring a shared vision* was their least frequent behavior ( $M = 44.50$ ,  $SD = 7.30$ ). Spotauski and Carter (1993) also looked at the leadership behaviors of department executive officers. They found that agricultural education executives were best at *enabling others to act* and needed help with *inspiring a shared vision* and *challenging the process* ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ). Woodrum and Safrit (2003) examined the leadership practices of West Virginia extension agents and determined again, that *enabling others to act* was the behavior exhibited most frequently ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) and *inspiring a shared vision* was the leadership behavior used least often ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ).

Research using the LPI has also found formal leadership education to be effective. Earnest (1996) discovered significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) pre and posttest increases for each of the five leadership behaviors of community leadership program participants in Ohio. Brungardt (1997) also found significant increases in leadership behaviors from the beginning to the end of the Leadership Certificate Program at Fort Hays State University. *Challenging the process*, *inspiring a shared vision*, *enabling others to act*, and *modeling the way* behaviors were significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) greater on the last day of the program compared to day one.

Positive changes in leadership behavior as a result of leadership development events in the FFA have been assumed for years, but the specifics of this development have not been articulated. This study helps define the leadership benefits purported by the FFA, and it helps build the leadership practices theory base by surveying adolescent leaders, as few researchers have evaluated the leadership practices of secondary education students and/or FFA members.

According to the conceptual model below (Figure 1.) that resulted from a synthesis of youth leadership research conducted by Ricketts, Osborne, and Rudd (2004) *family*, *school*, *self*, *community*, the *agriculture instructor*, the *agriculture program*, and the *FFA* were identified as the key variables that may, in theory, explain leadership in the FFA (p. 43). Within this broad conceptual model this study specifically focused on describing Success Conference participants'/FFA members' leadership behavior, and their age, gender, rural, suburban, or urban background, the number of agriculture teachers and classes students have had taken. Gender was of particular interest because Student LPI findings (Posner & Brodsky, 1993, 1994), thus far, have indicated no difference between males and females for any of the leadership behaviors, but recent findings in agricultural education research indicate supposed prominence of females in leadership positions in the FFA (Kelly & Osborne, 2004; Ricketts et al., 2004; Seevers & Dormody, 1994).

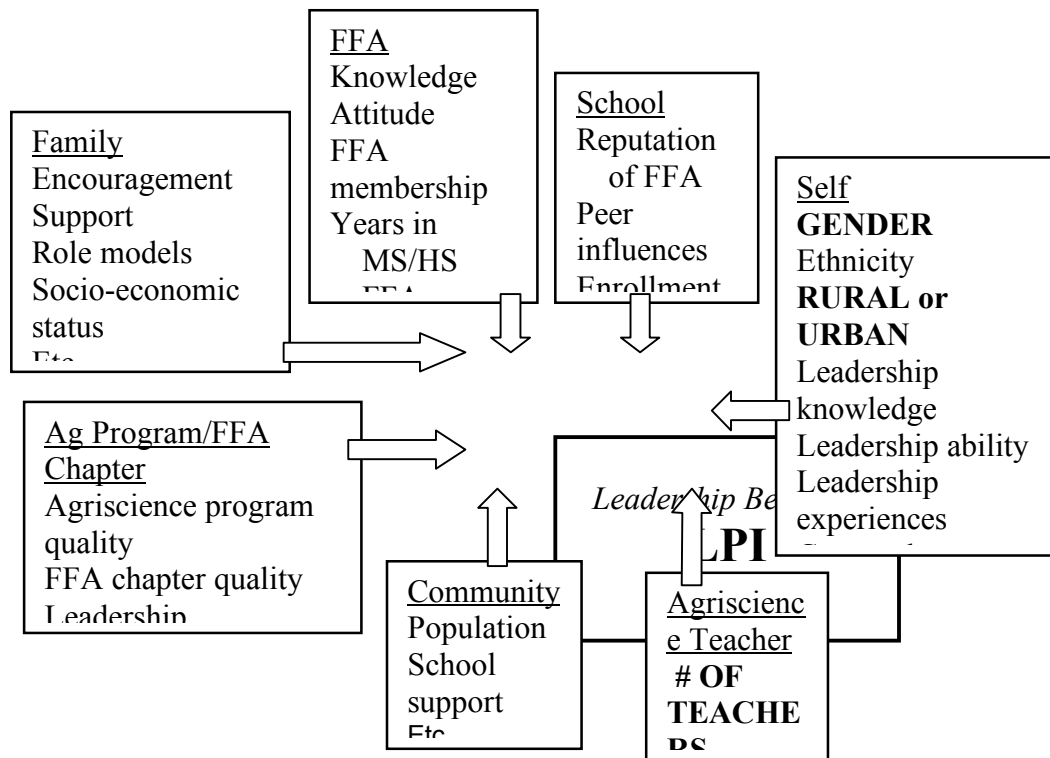


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Factors Leadership Behavior (LPI). (Adapted from Ricketts, Osborne, & Rudd, 2004).

## Methods

The purpose of this study was to assess the leadership practices or behaviors of FFA members participating in a leadership development workshop known as the *Success Conference* in [state]. Specific objectives of this study were the following:

1. Describe FFA members attending the Success Conference in [state].
2. Describe the leadership practices of FFA members attending the Success Conference.
3. Compare leadership practices based on participant demographics.

Participants (n=111) of the Success Conference, a leadership development workshop for FFA members sponsored by the [state] Department of Agricultural Education, served as the

purposive sample representing the target population of FFA leaders in [state]. Upon submission of parental and personal consent forms, participants were asked to complete the *Student Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)* (Kouzes & Posner, 1998). The design of the study was both descriptive and *ex post facto*, since the factors that were being identified were pre-existing (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). The design was employed to describe the present demographics of Success Conference participants and to identify the leadership practices of the sample of FFA leaders in [state].

Leadership practices were determined using the *Student LPI* (Kouzes & Posner, 1998), which has shown strong reliability. Posner and colleagues have reported internal reliability scores of 0.66 for *challenging the process*, 0.79 for *inspiring a shared vision*, 0.70 for *enabling others to act*, 0.68 for *modeling the way*, and 0.80 for *encouraging the heart* (1998). Other researchers have reported reliabilities for the five leadership practices between 0.63 and 0.83 (Snyder, 1992) and 0.83 and 0.92 (Levy, 1995). Demographic data were collected with a researcher-developed instrument. Gender, age, size of community, number of agriculture teachers, and number of agriculture classes were the variables analyzed with the demographic instrument.

Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics using SPSS and by comparing conference participants with normative data collected for *Student LPI*. Inferential statistics were not used in this study because of the sampling procedure, but simple comparisons between participants were also conducted.

## Findings

### *Objective One - Describe FFA members attending the Success Conference in [state]*

Success conference participants were over 16 years of age. Half the participants were male and half were female. Eighty (71.4%) students were from a rural area, 16 (14.3%) were from a suburban area, and 12 (10.7%) students were from an urban area. Eighty percent reported having one to two agriculture teachers, and 78 (71%) students had at least two or more agricultural education courses (Table 1).

Table 1  
*Demographic Profile of [state] Success Conference Participants*

Demographic Variables	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	111	16.35	1.06
Gender	111	0.49	0.50
Rural/Suburban/Urban	109	1.40	0.76
# of Ag Teachers	111	1.78	0.94
# of Ag Classes	110	2.72	1.82

### *Objective 2 - Describe the leadership practices of FFA members attending the Success Conference*

Success conference participants scored the highest on *encouraging the heart* ( $M = 23.77$ ;  $SD = 4.18$ ) placing [state] FFA members participating in the Success Conference at approximately the 45<sup>th</sup> percentile for all Student LPI scores, and slightly below Kouzes' and Posner's (1998) normative data for high school students. *Enabling others to act* ( $M = 23.75$ ;  $SD = 4.40$ ) was the number two-ranked leadership practice of participants, however this score placed participants in approximately the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile for all Student LPI scores and almost a full point below the normative data for similar high school students. Respectively, participants' 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> rated leadership practices were *inspiring a shared vision* ( $M = 23.04$ ;  $SD = 4.60$ ), *modeling the way* ( $M = 22.94$ ;  $SD = 4.18$ ), and *challenging the process* ( $M = 22.78$ ;  $SD = 3.96$ ). These scores placed [state] FFA members/conference participants' in the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile for *inspiring a shared vision*, in the 55<sup>th</sup> percentile for *modeling the way*, and the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile for *challenging the process*. Participants' scores for inspire, model, and challenge were each higher than Kouzes' and Posner's normative scores for high school students.

Table 2  
*Leadership Practices of Success Conference Participants in [state]*

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	Percentile	Normative Scores for High School Students
Encourage the Heart	111	23.77	4.18	1	45 <sup>th</sup>	24.18
Enabling Others to Act	111	23.75	4.40	2	35 <sup>th</sup>	24.72
Inspire a Shared Vision	111	23.04	4.60	3	60 <sup>th</sup>	21.89
Model the Way	111	22.94	4.18	4	55 <sup>th</sup>	22.02
Challenge the Process	111	22.78	3.96	5	60 <sup>th</sup>	21.62

*Objective Three - Compare leadership practices based on participant demographics*

A simple comparison of *Student LPI* mean scores by age, size of community, number of agriculture teachers, and number of agricultural courses taken indicated no leadership practice differences among the aforementioned variables. However, females outscored males on all five of the leadership practices.

Table 3  
*Student LPI Scores for Female and Male Success Conference Participants*

	Females			Males		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Encourage the Heart	54	24.61	4.01	57	22.97	4.22
Enabling Others to Act	54	24.67	4.30	57	22.88	4.35
Inspire a Shared Vision	54	23.91	4.90	57	22.21	4.17
Model the Way	54	23.89	3.97	57	22.04	4.20
Challenge the Process	54	23.59	4.10	57	22.02	3.70

Conclusions and Implications

The average participant of the [state] Success Conference was just over 16 years of age, but 95 out of 111 participants were either 15, 16, or 17 years of age. Information about

conference participants' age should have been important for future conference developers since curriculum and informal learning opportunities are supposed to be age appropriate when offered (Shinn, Briers, Christiansen, Edwards, Harlin, Lawver, Lindner, Murphy, & Parr, 2003, p. 20). However, there was no noticeable difference between age categories for any of the leadership practices.

Most of the students were from a rural area, but given the need for added diversity in agricultural education and the National FFA Organization (Luft, 1996), leadership conference developers may need to continue designing the workshops with rural, suburban, and urban students in mind. Most participants had one to two agriculture teachers, and the large majority had taken at least two or more agricultural education courses, indicating that Success Conference participants were at least somewhat experienced agricultural education students and FFA members.

Success Conference participants were equally divided in terms of gender. This is an important finding for leadership conference designers in [state] since the 50% female participant figure for this study differs from the fact that only 38% of National FFA members are female (National FFA Organization, 2004, ¶1). However, according to the National FFA Organization, females hold over 50% of the leadership positions, so the fact that half of the Success Conference participants were female should have been expected.

Success Conference participants were best at *encouraging the heart*, which involves recognizing individual contributions in a group and/or celebrating team accomplishments (Kouzes & Posner, 1998), but although [state] Success Conference participants scored highest on *encouraging the heart*, they scored lower than Kouzes' and Posner's normative scores for similar high school-aged students. In fact, participants were only in the 45<sup>th</sup> percentile compared to other students who have taken the LPI. This phenomenon is repeated in participants' 2<sup>nd</sup> most frequent leadership behavior of *enabling others to act*, which was all about fostering collaboration and strengthening others. Again, [state] FFA members were only in the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile of all students who had taken the LPI.

Even though *inspiring a shared vision*, *modeling the way*, and *challenging the process* were 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> in terms of relative rank, participants' scores were higher than instrument developers' normative data for each leadership practice (Kouzes & Posner, 1998). Participants were more likely to envision an uplifting future for an organization and enlist others in a common vision, more likely to set the example and focus on achieving small wins, and more likely to search for opportunities, experiment, and take risks than the majority of other students who had completed the LPI.

Lastly, gender was the only demographic variable with noticeable leadership practice differences. In fact, females scored higher than males on all five of the leadership practices. This finding may explain why Ricketts, Osborne, and Rudd (2004) found that "...females are more predominate in local FFA chapter officer teams and leadership activities than males" (p. 50) or why Zielinski (1999) reported that females have established themselves as a majority presence in student activities.

## Recommendations

Leadership workshop designers in [state] and other states may not need to worry about meticulously developing age-appropriate leadership curricula for students between the ages of 16 and 18. Perhaps age appropriate curricula should be reserved for more pronounced differences between age groups.

Although the majority of Success Conference participants were from rural [state], state staff and teacher educators offering leadership development opportunities should design the program to reach rural, suburban, and urban participants. Conference coordinators should also seek to recruit participants from more urban areas to improve diversity of participants in the [state] Success Conference. Regardless of where students came from they all seemed to have similar leadership behaviors.

Since participants scored lower than expected on *encouraging the heart* and *enabling others to act*, future leadership development opportunities should focus on activities that foster collaboration, strengthen others, recognize the contributions of others, and that celebrate team accomplishments as a leader. Participants were actually in the 45<sup>th</sup> percentile for encouraging the heart, perhaps agriculture teachers should also encourage FFA members and agricultural education students to try some of the following activities suggested by Kouzes and Posner (1998).

- Wander around ... [the agriculture classroom]... for the express purpose of finding someone in the act of doing something that exemplifies the organization's [FFA] standards. Find a way to celebrate that person on the spot.
- Plan a festive celebration for each small milestone your team [FFA officer team] reaches.
- Tell a public story about a person in your organization who went above and beyond the call of duty.
- Ask your teammates to help design a reward and recognition system for your organization.
- Give people tools they can use to recognize one another, such as index cards or notepads printed with the message "You made my day" or "You are a hero."
- Say 'thank you' when you appreciate something that someone has done.
- Write at least three thank you notes each week.
- Ask people in your organization how and when they like to be recognized. Create a list with this information and distribute this throughout the organization (p. 67).

Kouzes and Posner also list several suggestions for improving the leadership behavior of *enabling others to act*. Because participants/FFA members in [state] scored in the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile for this leadership behavior, agricultural educators may also need to implement a few of the following activities.

- Find ways to increase interaction among people in your organization [FFA Chapter] who need to work more effectively together.
- Establish easily accessible meeting areas that encourage people to interact.

- Assign important tasks to others. Don't always hog the limelight. Let someone else make a key presentation. Coach and support that person.
- Ask for volunteers. Give people choices. You build commitment when people don't feel forced into taking action. You build motivation when people feel like they're in control.
- Interview an athletic coach. Ask how you might apply the coach's methods in your organization. What does it mean to "coach"?
- Mentor new members in your organization [FFA Chapter]. Pair experienced leaders with emerging leaders (p. 65).

Future research should further examine the factors that influence leadership. Specifically, future research should determine what experiences [state] FFA members who participated in the Success Conference received that allowed them to be more likely to *inspire a shared vision, model the way, or challenge the process*. Future research should also continue to analyze the apparent leadership differences between males and females in agricultural education and the National FFA Organization.

### References

- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Razavieh, A. (1996). *Introduction to research and education* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Ft. Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Brannon, T., Holley, C. W., & Key, J. P. (1989). Impact of vocational agriculture/FFA on community leadership. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 30(3), 37-45.
- Brungardt, C. L. (1997). *Evaluation of the outcomes of an academic collegiate leadership program*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kansas State University.
- Dormody, T. J. & SeEVERS, B. S. (1994). Predicting youth leadership life skills development among FFA members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 35 (2), 65-71.
- Earnest, G. W. (1996). Evaluating community leadership programs. *Journal of Extension*, 34 (1), Retrieved October 15, 2004, from <http://www.joe.org/joe/1996february/rb1.html>.
- Kelly, S. A. & Osborne, E. W. (2004). Female leadership in urban Florida FFA programs. *Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research*, 54 (1), 254-266.
- Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (1995). *The leadership challenge; How to keep getting extraordinary things done in organizations*. SanFrancisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (1997). *Leadership practices inventory [LPI]* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). SanFrancisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (1998). *Student leadership practices inventory*. SanFrancisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Krill, T. L., Carter, R. I., & Williams, D. L. (1997). An exploration of the leadership practice enabling others to act: A case study. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 38(4), 42-49.
- Levy, M. J. (1995). *Followers' perceptions of leaders: prototypes and perceptions of resident assistants*. Unpublished masters thesis, University of Maryland.
- Luft, V. D. (1996). Extent to which cultural diversity is addressed in secondary agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 37 (3), 67-75.
- Posner, B. Z. & Brodsky, B. (1992). A leadership development instrument for college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 33(4), 231-237.
- Posner, B. Z. & Brodsky, B. (1993). The leadership practices of effective RAs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 34(4), 300-304.
- Posner, B. Z. & Brodsky, B. (1994). Leadership practices of effective student leaders: Gender makes no difference. *NASPA Journal*, 31(2), 113-120.
- Ricketts, J. C. & Rudd, R. D. (2004). Leadership development factors leading to the success of former Florida state FFA officers. *Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research*, 54 (1), 242-253.
- Ricketts, J. C., Osborne, E. W., & Rudd, R. D. (2004). Female leadership in rural Florida FFA chapters. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 45 (1), 42-53.
- Ricketts, S. C. (1982). *Leadership and Personal Development Abilities Possessed by High School Seniors Who are FFA Members in Superior FFA Chapters, Non-superior Chapters, and by Seniors Who Were Never Enrolled in Vocational Agriculture*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.
- Rudd, R. D. (2000). Leadership styles of Florida's county extension directors: Perceptions of self and others. *Proceedings of the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual National Agricultural Education Research Conference*. 81-92.
- Seevers, B., & Dormody, T. J. (1994). Predicting youth life leadership skills development among senior 4-H members: A tri-state study. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 35(3), 64-69.
- Shinn, G. C., Briers, G. E., Christiansen, J. E., Edwards, M. C., Harlin, J. F., Lawver, D. E., Lindner, J. R., Murphy, T.H., and Parr, B.A. (2003). Improving student achievement in mathematics: An important role for secondary agricultural education in the 21st Century. Unpublished manuscript. Texas A&M University. College Station, TX.
- Snyder, N. L. (1992). *Empowering leadership and achieving style: A study of gender differences between fraternity and sorority presidents*. Unpublished masters thesis, University of Maryland.

- Spotauski, D. R. & Carter, R. I. (1993, Fall). Self evaluation of leadership practices and behaviors used by department executive officers in agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 17-25.
- Stogdill, R. M. (1974). *Handbook of leadership: A survey of theory and research*. New York: The Free Press.
- Townsend, C., & Carter, R. (1983). The relationship of participation in FFA activities and leadership citizenship, and cooperation. *Journal of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture*, 24 (1), 20-25.
- Wingenbach, G. J. & Kahler, A. A. (1997). Self-perceived youth leadership and life skills of Iowa FFA members. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 38 (3), 18-27.
- Woodrum, W. & Safrit, R. D. (2003). Leadership practices of West Virginia University extension agents working with the 4-H youth development program. *Journal of Extension*, 41 (3). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2003june/rb3.shtml>.
- Zielinski, M. B. (1999). *A case study of gender in high school student government leadership and a test of Rotter's and Bandura's theories of social learning*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo.