

## Introduction / Purpose

Summer Bridge is a college transition program for incoming EOP first year college students to help them get acquainted with university expectations and culture prior to enrolling in their first term at Cal Poly Pomona. The program aims to expose students to academic and social expectations, policies and regulations, and resources and services. Summer Bridge also intends to help students develop meaningful relationships with faculty, staff, and peers to cultivate academic and personal support networks that will enhance their college experience and support their overall success through graduation. Currently the program holds two student leadership positions. The Summer Bridge Resident Advisors are responsible for after-hour programming, emergency response, crisis intervention, community building, and to serve as an overall resource for participating students. The Summer Bridge Champions are responsible for daytime programming, guiding groups of about twenty students throughout the program, emergency response, crisis intervention, community building, and to serve as an overall resource for transitioning students.

As student leaders serve program participants, they also gain valuable and transferable skills in the areas of leadership, mentorship, and communication through this experience. The purpose of this study was to identify the professional growth that student leaders experience after they complete their leadership roles in the Summer Bridge program.

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Summer Bridge student leaders will demonstrate growth in multiple areas of leadership following their successful completion of the resident assistant or champion position requirements.
- Summer Bridge student leaders will demonstrate mentorship behaviors in interactions with the participants of Summer Bridge.
- Summer Bridge student leaders will establish professional communication skills through group dialogue with their peers, participants, and professional staff members.



## Methodology

Summer Bridge student leaders consisted of 6 Resident Advisors and 5 Champions. Data was collected through two methods: direct observations and a survey distributed through Google Forms.

### Direct Observations

Direct observation data was collected by two professional lead staff who observed the students leaders as they planned programs, facilitated activities, interacted with students and staff, and engaged in team work. Data was collected for three pre-determined areas of professional growth: leadership, mentorship, and professional communication. A rubric was used by the lead staff to evaluate student leaders' demonstrated skills before and after the program and training, and to identify any change in the pre-determined areas. The rubric was used to score observable skills and behaviors that student leaders displayed, and it captured growth through changes in the scores for skills and behaviors observed before and after their role in the program.

### Survey

A survey was distributed to all 11 student leaders at the conclusion of the program. The survey asked student leaders to rate their skills on three pre-determined growth areas as they perceived their own skills prior to and after the completion of their role in the summer program. The research team did not ask students to rate themselves before the program because it expected inflated responses due to social desirability (wanting to be perceived positively by their supervisors as they started their leadership role), and because students would have a better understanding of each growth area after their experience, leading to more precise perceptions of growth in each area. Growth areas included the following; leadership, mentorship, and professional communication. The items used to operationalize these areas are listed in the measures section. Student leaders were first asked to define the three topic areas to get an understanding of the basis of their self-ratings for each area overall. Then students rated their skills on the specific items used to measure each area by the researchers.

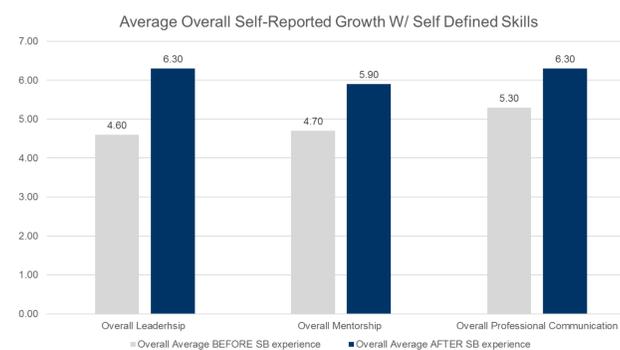
### Measures

The research team defined leadership, mentorship, and professional communication using abilities that we felt encompassed these terms. Leadership skills included: time management, ability to work on a team, ability to include oneself as a member of a team, facilitating group activities, practicing professional ethics, maintaining professional image, building community, and recognizing positive behaviors. Mentorship skills included: establishing a mentoring relationship with others, appreciating differences in students, referring students to resources on campus, identifying a shift in student behavior, and guiding students through their college transition. Professional communication included: public speaking, dealing with personal confrontation, mediating conflict between two other people, comfort and confidence levels when speaking to groups.

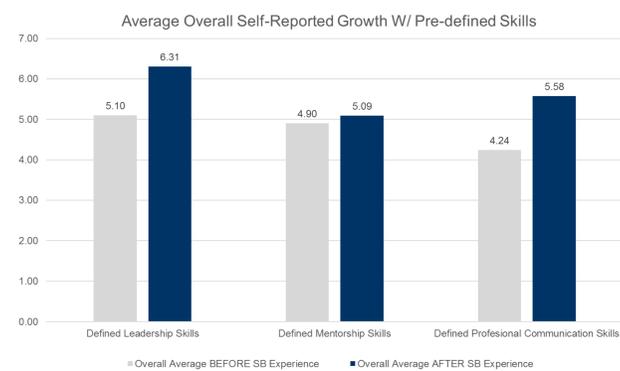
## Results

Direct Observation Rubric			
Rating	S.L.O. 1	S.L.O. 2	S.L.O. 3
Advanced Growth	Student demonstrated growth in all areas of leadership.	Student demonstrated ownership of mentorship role through interactions with SB participants.	Student demonstrated growth in all areas of professional communication.
Expected Growth	Student demonstrated growth in multiple areas of leadership.	Student demonstrated a few mentorship behaviors.	Students demonstrated growth in a few areas of professional communication.
No Growth	Student did not demonstrate any growth.	Student did not demonstrate any mentorship behaviors.	Student did not demonstrate any growth.

Through direct observation ratings by the Transition Programs Assistant (TPA) and Residence Life Coordinator (RLC), all students leaders received marks in the expected or advanced categories for all three student learning outcomes. Students demonstrated growth in multiple skill areas that were identified as defining leadership, mentorship, and professional communication.



After completing their Summer Bridge experience, student leaders reported a 24.29% increase in overall leadership, a 17.14% increase in overall mentorship, and a 14.29% increase in overall professional communication. This growth was based on the student leader's definition of leadership, mentorship, and professional communication.



After completing their Summer Bridge experience, student leaders reported a 17.32% increase in leadership, 2.65% increase in mentorship, and a 19.08% increase in professional communication based on previously defined skills that make up leadership, mentorship, and professional communication by the research team.

## Discussion

When student leaders provided their own definition of leadership, their growth level was much higher overall than when they rated their growth on pre-determined skills that defined leadership per the research team. Their definitions were broad and contained attributes that were used separately for mentorship and professional communication by the researchers. This explains why the largest growth was observed in leadership when defined by student leaders. When growth areas were measured with pre-determined skills, they may have captured skills that students did not perceive as part of the growth areas and did not perceived that they possessed such skills. This may explain lower ratings when areas were defined, but also provides more precise operationalizations of the growth areas. Students showed little growth in mentorship compared to the other areas when pre-defined. It may be that student leaders had mentorship skills that they may not have perceived as such before, but did possess coming into the experience. This may also apply to leadership and professional communication skills once students had specific items to evaluate themselves on. Through direct observations, we saw a clear growth in skills and abilities that student leaders experienced through their roles. Many of the student leaders are first-generation college students. They may not have reported as much growth as was seen through direct observations because they may not have been validated on these skills in the past. In order for students to develop, they must be validated in their experiences first (Rendon, 1994). If these terms were defined and validations exercises were done at the beginning of training, more self reported growth may have occurred.



## Limitations

This was the inaugural year for the Summer Bridge Champion position which shifted some of the duties and responsibilities that the RAs had in previous years. This may have shifted the growth observed in some of the RAs. Our study only had eleven student leaders. Data collection will continue in future years to add to these findings. All student leaders came from different backgrounds and levels of experience in leadership, mentorship, and communication which could have affected our results.

## Conclusion & Implications

Overall, all student leaders demonstrated growth in the areas of leadership, mentorship, and professional communication. Intentional training focused on developing their skills in these areas can help their overall growth and development. Our results present a practical relationship between student leadership roles in Summer Bridge and their growth in skills related to leadership, mentorship, and professional communication. Continued assessment could provide enough data to show a statistical correlation. While conducting these transition programs, it is important to serve our student leaders as much as we serve our participants.