

# THE GROWTH IN LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENT OF FELLOWSHIP THROUGH LITERACY.

Creating friendships and developing literacy skills to assist rural students in helping them thrive at Universities.

## AUTHORS

Rachelle Andreatta  
Joy Morgan  
Wendy Warner  
Rachel Vann  
Travis Park  
Brent Jennings

## AFFILIATION

North Carolina State  
University

## INTRODUCTION

At North Carolina State University, rural students make up 34% of the population. With the majority of these students wanting to pursue leadership-based careers and eventually return to their rural communities, program leaders undertook the task of creating an environment for these students to grow as leaders among members of other rural communities. Students participate in small group book clubs where they dive deeper into topics of leadership and rural issues. The books included: "The Truth About Leadership" and "Rural People and Communities in the 21st Century". The program's graduate assistant led the book club sessions, met with the book club groups twice a month, and facilitated the conversations.

## CONTACT

For more information about how to start your own program, feel free to contact us.  
**Rachelle Andreatta** rrandrea@ncsu.edu  
**Joy Morgan** jemorga2@ncsu.edu

## HOW IT WORKS

The students applied to the REAL program and were selected based on their applications. They were required to be from rural communities and enrolled in an agricultural-related degree program.

Program directors selected the books, focusing on leadership and addressing rural communities. Focusing on one book per semester, participants completed the assigned readings and were guided by reflection questions developed by the program graduate assistant.

Participants would meet twice a month with the graduate assistant to discuss the bi-weekly reading that the graduate assistant selected. The graduate assistant's responsibility was to help the students dig deeper into the understanding of the book concepts and further develop reflection questions to help them grow as individuals. This was done by providing pre-reading questions to the students to enable them to dig deeper into their reading and personal experience.

## STUDENT REFLECTION

"I feel like the book club meetings have really impacted my leadership qualities personally because of how much I have gained from them. One important leadership quality that the book club has impacted me would be listening. While everyone is sharing their answers to the questions each week, I get to improve my active listening skills. I feel like the course of the months of being in this has helped me carry this into my daily life conversations with friends and family. I just recently got a compliment from a friend for being such a good active listener. I felt like it was so much more than a compliment because I have been able to grow in this area where I once wasn't as strong."

"I have gotten a better understanding of what it means to be a true leader and the very important aspects of a leader. I have also gotten to know the people in the program. We all come from different parts of the state, yet we are connected through the world of agriculture."

## RESULTS TO DATE

To date, the book club has brought 20 students, from first-year students to doctoral students at North Carolina State University, together to learn about leadership and agriculture and partake in fellowship. These students vary in major, agricultural experience, and future career goals. However, when brought together, the students create discussion from personal experience with respect and integrity. They can learn about others' opinions of leadership and agriculture, therefore helping them to grow as individuals.

## COST/RESOURCES

To support the REAL book club, program leaders paid for the books. "The Truth About Leadership" costs \$13.98 per book, and "Rural People and Communities in the 21st Century" costs \$29.95 per book. Books were provided for each participant, the program leader, and the graduate program assistant. The REAL program was created through grant funding which supported a graduate assistant. The graduate assistant who leads the book clubs and assists with the overall program is paid through this grant.

### IMPORTANT!

Grad assistants should work around the schedule of the students for book club for maximum participation.

## REFERENCES

- Ewing, J. C., Bruce, J. A., & Ricketts, K. G. (2000). Effective leadership development for undergraduates: How important is active participation in collegiate organizations?. *Journal of Leadership Education*, (7)3, 118-131. [https://journalofleadershiped.org/jole\\_articles/effective-leadership-development-for-undergraduates-how-important-is-active-participation-in-collegiate-organizations/](https://journalofleadershiped.org/jole_articles/effective-leadership-development-for-undergraduates-how-important-is-active-participation-in-collegiate-organizations/)
- Ganss, K. M. (2016). The college transition for first-year students from rural Oregon communities. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, (53)3, 269-280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2016.1157487>
- Layfield, K. D., Radhakrishna, R. B., & Andreasen, R. J. (2000). Self-perceived leadership skills of students in a leadership programs in agriculture course. *Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research*, 50(1), 62-68. <http://jsaer.org/pdf/Vol50/50-00-062.pdf>
- Malhoit, G. C. (2005). Providing rural Students with a high quality education: The rural perspective on the concept of educational adequacy. *Rural School and Community Trust*, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497989.pdf>
- Schutz, P. F. (2003). Upon entering college: First semester experiences of first-generation, rural students from agricultural families. *The rural educator*, 26, 48-51. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ783837>

## FUTURE PLANS

In the future, we plan to incorporate partners for book club sessions to promote further networking and relationship-building among the REAL cohort. For the partner sessions, the students will grab lunch or coffee and discuss questions provided by the book club facilitator. Then at the larger book club session, students are able to share their partner discussions with greater context. This is suggested to help them improve their leadership ability and keep each other in check and create more profound discussions surrounding their home communities and personal leadership experiences. Research supports that fellowship among students promotes success and establishing community; therefore, by allowing the students to create these friendships, they are more likely to thrive in an environment which they are not familiar with.

We strongly suggest that those interested in establishing book club programs select books relatable to participants. The books selected for our book club have scenarios and situations that college students could relate to, which aided in generating conversation. Also, participants enjoyed having pre-questions to guide their readings. These pre-questions also assisted students in their participation.