

**Leadership Experiences of Administrators in Colleges of Agriculture at United States 1890
Institutions: Leadership Identity Development Model**

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Introduction

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established in the United States in the early 1800s to provide educational opportunities to people of African descent. Black students were often excluded from existing public and private universities, even after specific laws were passed, resulting in a shortage of higher education opportunities (Miller et al., 2021). In Fall 2022, nearly 289,000 students were enrolled at HBCUs, with the majority attending four-year public institutions. Female students accounted for 64% of the total enrollment, reflecting ongoing demographic trends in these institutions (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). In 2020, there were 836,597 full-time faculty members at all degree-granting institutions. Of those, 67% were white, 5.5% were Black, 5.3% were Latino or Hispanic, and 11% were Asian American (NCES, 2023). This paper aims to understand the leadership identities of Black faculty and administrators at HBCUs colleges of agriculture in the United States.

Theoretical Framework

This research study analyzes and builds on the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model to investigate how Black administrators' definitions of leadership inform their leadership identity development. Leadership identity development has six stages: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis (Komives et al., 2005). The research questions for this qualitative study were:

1. How do participants define leaders and leadership based on their experiences and perspectives at colleges of agriculture at HBCUs?
2. How do participants' perspectives on leaders and leadership influence their placement in the LID model?

Methods

This study utilized narrative inquiry as a method grounded in literary theory (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Narrative inquiry enabled the study to explore administrators' leadership experiences, as they shared personal stories from their roles as faculty members and administrators at their respective HBCU institutions. A total of six study participants were selected through snowball sampling. All held the rank of associate or full professor and were current or past administrators within colleges of agriculture at land-grant HBCUs. Data was gathered through systematic, open-ended interviews conducted at participants' institutions or neutral locations (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended, conducted in person, and audio recorded. During data collection, the researcher journaled their reflections before and after each interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). Peer debriefing and reflexive journaling were used during transcript review and theme development to enhance the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative data were analyzed using a deductive approach. Interview responses were read for deeper understanding, coded, and grouped into themes representing the six stages of the LID model.

Findings

All participants in this study exhibited characteristics aligned with the six stages of the LID model:

Theme #1: Awareness—Participants shared stories of individuals who inspired them to become leaders during their youth or early careers.

Theme #2: Exploration/Engagement—Participants demonstrated positive behavior patterns that significantly influenced their decisions to become administrators and role models.

Theme #3: Leadership Identified – Participants understood the hierarchical nature of group interactions.

Theme #4: Leadership Differentiated—Participants discussed the impact of effective leadership and the importance of creating a positive institutional environment.

Theme #5: Generativity—Participants emphasized empowerment and mentorship, expressing a sense of responsibility to help students earn degrees and advance in their careers.

Theme #6: Integration/Synthesis—Participants highlighted the role of the environment in fostering lifelong learning and continued self-development.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

As administrators reflected on their leadership experiences, a clear correlation with the LID model emerged. Through reflection, they identified leadership skills that they previously developed and continue to use throughout their careers. Supportive relationships with family and colleagues influenced participants' leadership identities. Many administrators noted that their parents were influential leaders who inspired them to pursue higher education. Leadership professional development programs should incorporate the stages of leadership identity when designing training for faculty seeking career advancement. Such programs, along with colleague support, can encourage faculty to pursue leadership roles. Demonstrating effective leadership practices empowers students and junior faculty to explore career paths in agriculture within higher education (Lamm et al., 2016; Velez, 2015). Understanding the leadership identity experiences of Black leaders in colleges of agriculture at HBCUs is essential, as these experiences directly impact student success in agriculture-related careers. Research suggests that Black educators are often more successful than their non-ethnic counterparts in schools serving Black students. While this research applies to HBCUs, it may also be relevant to other types of institutions.

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