DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE LEADER DEVELOPERS:
A CASE STUDY OF AIR OFFICERS COMMANDING

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This dissertation is a qualitative case study that examined how the United States Air Force Academy’s (USAFA) Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Master’s Program prepares officers to be leader developers. AOCs are sent through a one-year education and training program called the AOC Master’s Program. Interviews, document reviews, and observations were conducted with AOCs while currently at USAFA, both within the program and in command, to determine what dispositions, behaviors, and skills make for an effective leader developer and how the program prepares them for this role. Findings from the research revealed the importance of possessing the proper disposition toward development, engaging in sensemaking, modeling, and psychological safety in fulfilling the role of a leader developer. In addition, findings demonstrated that while room exists for improvement, the AOC Master’s Program and its emphasis on developmental counseling with leadership studies proved valuable in preparing officers for their leader developer role. These findings benefit USAFA in continuing to improve in developing leaders of character while also providing insights to the larger leader and leadership development community regarding this little studied role of leader developer.

**Keywords:** Leader developer, leader development, leadership development, United States Air Force Academy, Air Officer Commanding
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late father, Dr. Samuel H. Larsen. He will forever be my main inspiration behind this dissertation and the quintessential leader developer in my experience.

“...though he died, he still speaks.”
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It is impossible to fully acknowledge all those who helped me with this project, from demonstrating what a leader developer is, to discussions about this unique role, to participating actively in my conducting and writing this dissertation. However, I will make special mention of a few. First of all, I want to thank my committee for their incredible support and guidance, and especially for that of my chairperson, Dr. Andrea Bingham, who helped me refine this project through countless hours over the course of three years. Next, I want to thank all the AOCs who participated in the research by sharing their experiences as leader developers—thank you for allowing me to learn from you and to share that learning with others. I also want to thank the leadership of the Air Force Academy’s Center for Character and Leadership Development for sponsoring me for this PhD. I want to acknowledge, too, the numerous professors, mentors, peers, colleagues, friends, and family members that have influenced this work, especially my late father, Dr. Samuel H. Larsen. In addition, I want to thank my wife, Angela, and my children, Colby, Bradley, Andrew, and Allyson, for putting up with hearing about this project over and over again these past three years—your patience, support, and love towards me are meaningful beyond words. And finally, I am grateful to the God of Migdol, who with a strong hand delivers again and again.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

No matter how defined and examined, leadership matters (Child, 1997; Cycyota, Ferrante, Green, Heppard, & Karolick, 2011; Hambrick, 2007; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Leadership occurs within complex and varied contexts involving many factors within dynamic and interconnected systems (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Richardson, 2008). Capitalizing on leadership experiences, leaders learn and develop the most when supported with coaching, mentoring, and action learning (Day, 2000). However, an apparent gap remains in published research about what it takes to be an effective leader developer, one whose primary role is focused on the development of someone else as a leader. This study aims to examine the role of leader developer and help shed light on what makes one effective and how best to prepare a person for such a role—specifically those leader developers at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA).

As Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001, p. 414) point out, “leaders are one element of an interactive network that is far bigger than they” which includes the followers, the team or the organization, the environment in which they operate, and more. Many researchers and authors have examined the complex phenomena of leadership from many perspectives and in many different ways, giving rise to many different theories and models (Northouse, 2016). These leadership theories and research have spanned more than a century (Rost, 1991), from the original “Great Man Theory” (Carlyle, 1840) of trait theories through the more behavioral and process-oriented approaches now in vogue (Northouse, 2016).
The United States Air Force Academy’s (USAFA) mission and vision statements indicate that its primary objective is to develop leaders of character (Silveria, 2018; USAFA Strategic Plan, 2015). As such, its faculty and staff must perform primarily as leader developers above and beyond their specialized roles and responsibilities for their specific positions (i.e. academic instructor, coach, commander, etc.). Particularly, Air Officers Commanding (AOCs) are focused fully on fulfilling this leader developer role and are sent through a one-year education and training program called the AOC Master’s Program. In this program, the AOCs earn a Master of Arts degree in Counseling and Leadership from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) in partnership with USAFA. Consequently, through gathering the perspectives of AOCs engaged as leader developers, this study aims to understand how the AOC Master’s program prepares officers to be leader developers, both its strengths and areas for improvements, while also helping identify the characteristics of an effective leader developer from those engaged directly in that role.

**Context**

To understand what a leader developer is, especially in the context of the Air Force Academy’s mission of developing cadets into leaders of character as officers in service to the nation, it is important to have at least a basic understanding of what is meant by a leader of character in the first place. Then, the role of a leader developer must be distinguished from that of simply being a leader. Finally, this section describes the social and political context surrounding USAFA’s recognition of the need to develop a program specifically tailored to developing leader developers (i.e. the AOC Master’s Program).
The Center for Character and Leadership Development’s (CCLD) Leader of Character Framework (LCF)

In 2011, the Air Force Academy released a paper outlining a framework for the definition of “leader of character” and how to develop such leaders. Up until that point in time, many definitions existed across the institution for what a leader of character was, and there were many disparate views of how to develop one (CCLD, 2011). The LCF was designed by a cross functional team of experts across USAFA to bring a sense of alignment to the efforts of the staff and faculty in fulfilling the mission of “developing leaders of character” (CCLD, 2011). The unique aspect of this model is that it overtly integrates the concepts of character with leadership by not merely discussing how to influence others toward a goal, but doing so honorably (Bottomley, Burgess, & Fox, 2014; Cycyota et al., 2011; Martin, Naylor, Jefferson, David, & Cavazos, 2015). Furthermore, the LCF does not merely describe what a leader of character is, but the model outlines a process by which to engage in developing this type of leader (CCLD, 2011). The LCF model is presented in Figure 1.
Figure 1. Framework for developing leaders of character.
While a deeper examination of the specifics within this framework follows in the literature review in Chapter 2, a basic understanding will be helpful in establishing the context and framework surrounding the present study. CCLD asserts that a leader of character lives honorably by consistently living out the virtues embodied in the Air Force’s core values of Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do. Secondly, a leader of character does not merely live honorably on his or her own but also lifts others to be their best possible selves. Finally, the leader of character impacts the entire team or organization by elevating their performance toward a common and noble purpose (CCLD, 2011). Developing someone into this leader of character is a continual process of helping that person own the pursuit of his or her own identity in such development, engaging them with purposeful experiences that help facilitate such growth, and giving opportunities and helping the leader being developed to practice habits of thoughts and actions consistent with the traits of a leader of character, i.e. one who lives honorably, lifts others, and elevates performance (CCLD, 2011).

The Leader Developer

Context plays a significant role in leadership effectiveness and leadership development (Day, 2000; Hannah & Avolio, 2010; Crissman, 2013; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Avolio 2016). A key part of that context includes the leader developer (Cangemi, Burga, Lazarus, Miller, & Fitzgerald, 2008; Ghosh, Haynes, & Kram, 2013; Chaimonkonrojna & Steane, 2015; Avolio, 2016). For the purpose of this study, I define a leader developer as not merely acting as a leader but someone who fulfills the primary responsibility of developing others as leaders (Crissman, 2013); their mission is not just to lead other people in accomplishing a shared
goal, but to develop those under their influence into leaders themselves. To put it in military terms, while the rest of the Air Force may focus on developing their people to accomplish the tasks of the mission (to defend the nation), leader developers such as at the Air Force Academy use tasks to develop their people (cadets) as leaders of character (accomplishing the overall mission of producing officers of character to lead the Air Force in service to the nation). In this case, the tasks of the mission refer to the activities and experiences (i.e. military duties and responsibilities, leadership roles, academic classes, athletic competitions and tests, etc.) in which the Air Force Academy engages the cadets as a means of developing them as leaders of character. These activities and experiences are not the ends in themselves, but rather the means to an end—a means of developing the cadet as a leader of character (CCLD, 2011). Thus, winning athletic events, achieving a perfect grade point average (GPA), marching well together, having the highest scores in an inspection, or excelling at any of the other endeavors built into their experiences, really mean little in and of themselves. Instead, pursuing excellence in these events provides the means for the cadets to develop as leaders of character, those who live honorably, lift others, and elevate performance. That is where the worth of these experiences lie: in their providing the context for growth of the leader (see Figure 2).
Figure 2. Mission of USAFA as different from normal organizations.

Within this context the leader developer engages in accomplishing the mission of helping their followers grow as leaders themselves. Again, the concept of a leader developer must be understood as different from merely being a good leader. While a leader influences a group of individuals to achieve a shared goal (Northouse, 2016), a leader developer’s goal focuses on the growth of the followers as leaders themselves. Thus, while the main goal of a leader is to influence others to accomplish something, the main goal of a leader developer revolves around the development of others as leaders. Although some leadership theories emphasize this kind of development of followers,
there seems to be a need for identifying if there are certain attitudes or behaviors that make a person more effective at helping others become better leaders beyond simply leading them to get a task accomplished. For example, just because someone can be a good mathematician does not mean that they possess the attitudes and skills to be a good math teacher; intuitively, we know that helping someone else learn math is different from simply being good at math. Likewise, just as someone may be a great athlete, those same skills do not mean that they will be a great coach of other athletes. In the same manner, this study approaches the idea of a leader developer being something different from simply a leader, though there are clearly overlaps. In the end, there is an extra emphasis on the development of one’s followers themselves as leaders. Because of this specific mission focused on development, and the surrounding cultural and political context that will be discussed next, leader developers require some form of preparation.

USAFA’s Leader Developers and Their Preparation

Understanding the social and political context which drove the creation of the AOC Master’s Program provides the foundation for studying what makes a leader developer effective and how best to prepare someone for that role. Therefore, the following sections provide a brief overview of the what was occurring nationally, within the Air Force, and specifically at USAFA during the time the AOC Master’s Program was created.

National socio-political context. The policy mandating the sending of USAFA AOCs through an advanced academic degree before assuming their role as leader developers was first created in 2003 (though a piloted program had been executed previously and will be discussed later). Prior to that year, AOCs were assigned through a
selective process and on-the-job training. During this time of the turn of the millennium, a lot of leadership challenges and world and national crises were taking place. Northouse (2016) calls attention to these “upheavals in society,” stating that

[t]he destruction on 9/11, corporate scandals at companies like WorldCom and Enron, and massive failures in the banking industry have all created fear and uncertainty. People feel apprehensive and insecure about what is going on around them, and as a result, they long for bona fide leadership they can trust and for leaders who are honest and good. (p. 195)

This desire in general to have leaders whom people can trust reinforced the need for leaders of character.

In addition, during the last decade of the 20th century, the issue of sexual assaults on college campuses was growing in the public awareness (Breitenbecher, 2000). Because of this, the federal government required that colleges and universities that receive federal funding must have sexual assault prevention programs (Breitenbecher, 2000). The rising concern in the public and political sphere over sexual assaults especially in America’s public institutions of higher education continued to trouble society as another disconcerting trend. “Trustworthy leadership,” as Northouse puts it (2016, p. 195), was all the more demanded in order to halt this growing epidemic across the nation.

**The Air Force context.** Within the national context of these “upheavals in society,” the United States Air Force renewed its emphasis on trusted servant-leaders to the nation. This was seen most poignantly in the development and release of the Airman’s Creed in 2007 by then Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen T. Michael Mosely
The Airman’s Creed was designed to formalize the identity of the Air Force’s personnel as warriors who serve their country with honor and trustworthiness. The creed states that an Airman serves as “my nation’s sword and shield” and that an Airman defends the country as “its sentry” (PACE, 2017). These words speak to the role of service members in the Air Force standing as guards protecting the citizens and freedoms of the United States. In essence, the Airman’s Creed was a declaration that members of the Air Force will be leaders who can be trusted to protect, rather than harm.

**USAFA context.** In January of 2003, allegations emerged both in official channels and in the media of widespread sexual assault problems at the United States Air Force Academy (DODIG, 2004). In May of 2003, the Secretary of the Air Force adopted the “Agenda for Change” and instituted corrective actions to mitigate and reverse this disturbing trend at its premier institution for developing leaders of character (USAFA, 2015). The “Agenda for Change” outlined numerous steps to help change the environment and culture at USAFA toward one that was helpful to victims and prevented sexual assaults, among other issues. One of the key requirements was to ensure that the AOCs were selectively chosen by a central board at the Air Force Personnel Center and that the Commandant of Cadets would have the final say in who is picked. In addition, these hand selected officers would be required to receive one year of graduate education resulting in a master’s degree in counseling or related field (DODIG, 2004). Since AOCs needed to be able to counsel cadets in crisis but also be experts in leadership development, this educational requirement was adopted in such a way that merged leadership and counseling to produce the AOC Master’s Program, a program that had already been piloted in 1998-1999 before the Air Force Academy’s surge in reported
sexual assault cases in 2003 (Appendix E). This combination of leadership and counseling was recognized as important to prepare the AOCs as leader developers who will not only be able to handle crises, but also, and far more frequently, put their counseling and leadership skills and knowledge to use establishing environments within their cadet squadrons more conducive to leadership development in the cadets themselves. The original documents of the pilot program, provided by the former USAFA Commandant at the time, explained that the AOC Master’s Program was designed to help better prepare officers for the multifaceted and difficult role of being a leader developer of college age individuals (S. Lorenz, personal communication, June 1, 2019). These documents stated that the “AOC role is complex involving the need to be an administrator, organizational climate influence[r], counselor, developer of the individual (both personally and professionally), disciplinarian, teacher, as well as the obvious commander” (Appendix E). After being formalized as a requirement just a few years later, the AOC Master’s Program continued this emphasis of merging the self-awareness, personal growth, and ability to connect and help others on an interpersonal level with the skills and behaviors associated with effective leadership in teams and organizations. This merger of counseling and leadership knowledge and abilities was meant to help prepare the AOCs for their role as leader developers (AOC Student Handbook, 2017).

The intent and curriculum of the AOC Master’s Program has remained essentially the same with minor modifications in individual classes, and thus it continues to be implemented fundamentally as planned (AFI 36-2301, 2013; AOC Student Handbook, 2017). In fact, the plan remains for the AOC Master’s Program to evolve as necessary to
meet the needs that emerge as the context at USAFA changes. As the AOC Student Handbook (2017) puts it, “the program is designed to be continually evolving” so that the “[s]tudents are trained to facilitate development in their cadets by creating an environment that promotes self-awareness and personal growth” (p. 4). Since the program is intended to evolve and grow, this study helps identify strengths as well as ways to improve that can be incorporated for future students.

**Problem Statement**

Little research has addressed the specific role of a leader developer, exploring what skills, behaviors, and dispositions makes a person effective in such a role, or studying how best to prepare someone for this unique leadership development role. The Air Force Academy’s mission is to develop leaders of character, and its AOCs are to be fully focused on fulfilling this mission as leader developers. Thus, there is a direct need for USAFA to better understand how its leader developers might be most effective, and also how USAFA might ensure its preparation program best equips its AOCs for their roles.

**Purpose Statement**

This research study addressed the topic of the leader developer by examining the AOC Master’s Program at USAFA using a qualitative case study design. In this study, I conducted interviews, document reviews, and observations of AOCs who are currently enrolled in the AOC Master’s Program and also those who have completed the master’s degree program and who are currently fulfilling duties at USAFA. I analyzed this data to better understand what AOCs, both those in training and those with experience, perceived
best made an effective leader developer. In addition, I used the data to illuminate how the AOCs view the AOC Master’s Program as preparation to execute this role.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation study examined the AOC Master’s Program’s ability to prepare individuals to be leader developers by studying what the AOCs learned during the program, and how they valued the courses while in the program, along with what aspects stood out after having been in command of a cadet squadron at USAFA and serving in the role of a leader developer. The study used the Center for Character and Leadership Development’s (CCLD) Leader of Character Framework (LCF) as well as other leadership and counseling theories taught to AOCs as a lens through which to view the findings (the conceptual framework for studying leader developers and their preparation is outlined in Chapter 2). Specifically, this qualitative case study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of AOCs at USAFA, what dispositions, behaviors, and skills make for an effective leader developer?
2. How do AOCs at USAFA perceive the AOC Master’s Program in preparing leader developers?
3. According to AOCs at USAFA, how should the program evolve to best equip AOCs to be leader developers?

This study’s findings may be used for decisions regarding the effectiveness of the AOC Master’s Program and how it should or should not be changed for maximum benefit to the overall mission of USAFA. Moreover, the findings gained from this study help close the gap in the leadership development literature surrounding the role of the leader
developer. By doing so, this study contributes not only directly to those involved in the specific program at USAFA, but it also offers insights to the larger leader and leadership development community and literature.

**Research Significance**

Studying how leaders develop has proven to be a challenging task because “it requires melding one fuzzy construct (leadership) with something that is equally complex and nebulous (development)” (Day & Sin, 2011, p. 546). While the last two decades has produced some advances in research surrounding leadership development (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014), these studies focus on the process of developing others rather than how a leader developer engages to effectively develop others into leaders within programs and contexts. In fact, I have found no studies specifically designed to explore this concept of a leader developer as the key facilitator whose primary role is helping someone else develop as a leader. The distinction here is easy to miss yet vitally important to understand. Whereas, the budding research into leadership development has looked largely at the “process” of developing people as leaders (Day et al., 2014), there remains a gap regarding the study of the “person” whose primary mission is to develop others as leaders. In fact, only one study, which examined leadership in general amongst Army commanders, actually used the term “leader developer,” though it is almost as a side note in a description of how commanders do not just lead but also need to be engaged in developing their people as leaders (Crissman, 2013). In contrast, I am using the term “leader developer” to describe a person who does not just develop their people as a part of their role, but whose primary role is to develop their people as leaders. Thus, a gap exists surrounding the leader developer role within the greater leader and leadership...
While this concept of a leader developer is not only applicable to USAFA and other military academies and institutions, other organizations engaged in developing leaders may benefit from the findings in this study (i.e. organizations such as the Center for Creative Leadership). By examining this topic utilizing qualitative research methods, I help provide a richer understanding of the experience of leader developers. Doing so yields concepts that can be used by others in the specific context of USAFA but also likely transferable to other similar contexts involving developing leaders. Thus, findings of this study have direct implications for improving the AOC Master’s Program while simultaneously providing a deeper understanding of the role of a leader developer for all faculty and staff at USAFA, the other service academies, as well as anyone engaged in developing other leaders in organizations around the globe.

In summary, this dissertation follows a five-chapter format. Chapter one has introduced the topic, placing this study within context while demonstrating its significance both specifically to USAFA and also with the larger leader and leadership development community. In chapter two, I present a review of pertinent leadership and counseling literature, establishing the foundation for the conceptual framework from which this study took place. Chapter three outlines my methodology, detailing how I conducted this qualitative case study to explore the topic of a leader developer and answer the research questions regarding how one is effective in this role and how to prepare for it. Chapter four reveals the findings of the study and how they relate to the research questions. Finally, chapter five concludes the dissertation by providing implications of these findings for policy, practice, and future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

While leadership can be defined in numerous ways, I use Northouse’s (2016) definition which describes leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2016, p. 7). This definition reflects the movement in leadership studies from static traits one is born with toward behaviors and characteristics that can be learned and developed by individuals (Rost, 1991; Zaccaro, 2007). Thus, the understanding of leadership as something that can be learned and developed has given rise to ideas about leadership development as people try to understand how best to advance leadership growth in individuals and organizations (Day, 2000; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). The recent turn of the century demonstrated a shift in leadership studies where scholars have come to distinguish between “leader development” and “leadership development,” where the former emphasizes the growth of an individual’s ability to lead while the latter addresses the growth in a group, team, or organization as a whole with regards to leadership (Day, 2000). Regardless of this often-used distinction, I think there are aspects that clearly affect both (Hughes, Ginnet, & Curphy, 2012), and therefore I use these terms similarly when discussing the topic. Accordingly, this study addresses the concept of the “leader developer” as a key part in leader and leadership development that is in need of more robust examination. McCall (2010) points out that a vital part for leaders to grow through developmental experiences is intentional organizational support, and I suggest that a vital component of that support is the person’s leader developer. Since Hughes, Ginnet, and Curphy (2012) point out that “less is known about the process of learning or how we
learn to be successful” (p. 57) as a leader, qualitative research seems a fitting place to explore this topic of how leader developers help individuals learn to be better leaders. Particularly, this study takes a qualitative deep dive into the experiences of the principal leader developers at the Air Force Academy in order to contribute toward better understanding what makes an effective leader developer and how best to prepare a person for this role. In order to lay the groundwork for this study, I provide a review of some key leadership and counseling theories related to developing and caring for followers. The relevant leadership theories I discuss include Transformational Leadership, Authentic Leadership, and Servant Leadership, and CCLD’s Leader of Character Framework (LCF). In addition, I examine briefly the counseling theories of Person-Centered Theory, Behavior Theory, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory and point out key aspects of each related to the leader developer. Elements of these counseling and leadership models form the foundation for The Leader Developer Conceptual Framework (Figure 6) and the focus of this study.

**Leadership Theories**

Many of the predominant theories and models concerning leadership today generally focus on the role of the leader’s influence on followers within a context of relationship and support. Such theories include Transformational Leadership (Avolio 1999; Bass & Avolio 1990; Bottomley, Burgess, & Fox, 2014; Burns, 1978), Authentic Leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008), and Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Greenleaf, Frick, & Spears, 1996; Liden, Panaccio, & Meuser, Hu, & Wayne, 2014; Spears & Lawrence,
2002). All three of these theories provide key underpinnings of USAFA’s Center for Character and Leadership Development’s (CCLD) Leader of Character Framework (2011), the leadership development model used with cadets. Furthermore, principles found within these four leadership models, in addition to the counseling theories which will be discussed in the next section, form the basis for the Leader Developer Conceptual Framework, the foundation of this proposed study.

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership emphasizes the leader’s influence over followers rather than their authority or power. Burns (1978) theorized that transformational leaders obtain support by inspiring followers who identify with the organization’s vision. In contrast, Burns (1978) identified that transactional leaders gained cooperation by establishing exchanges with their followers and continually monitoring those exchanges for effectiveness. Considering typical leadership development practice as conducted by coaches and mentors, the focus of their efforts include helping develop broader understanding, seeking development, and learning from their leadership experiences (Day, 2000). These core developmental behaviors are highly consistent with transformational leadership.

A transformational leader cares for her followers and focuses on helping them develop and grow, with the goal that the followers’ growth then builds up the group and increases performance. A meta-analysis of 626 correlations from 87 studies identified that transactional leaders are capable of performing at similar levels as transformational leaders (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), however, this does not account for organizations that expect their leaders to be leader developers.
The four dimensions of transformational leadership demonstrate face validity with developmental efforts. Bass and Avolio (1994) described transformational leadership as encompassing four main attributes or behaviors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Idealized influence refers, in essence, to the leader as a role model in living out the values and behaviors expected of one’s followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leadership demonstrate moderately strong correlations with follower job satisfaction, follower’s satisfaction with the leader, and importantly, follower motivation (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In this phenomenon, the followers look up to their leader as an example of what they are to strive to become. The leader not only tells the followers how they should behave and act, but the leader herself demonstrates the very characteristics and behaviors that she demands of her people. To use common vernacular, not only does the leader “talk the talk” but that leader also “walks the walk.” Inspirational motivation consists of the leader inspiring followers to commit to the team or organization’s vision and be motivated to work toward its accomplishment. This can be conceptualized as the “half-time speech” a coach gives a team in the locker room to “fire them up” for the second half of play. Individualized consideration deals mostly with caring for one’s subordinates through both professional and personal support as well as challenging them to grow and succeed. When a leader exhibits individualized consideration, followers feel valued and invested in—essentially, followers feel that they matter as members of the team but also simply as unique persons. Finally, intellectual stimulation has to do with a leader’s encouragement of her followers to be innovative and creative while empowering them to find their own solutions to problems or improvements. Jung and Sosik (2003) showed
that transformational leadership of this kind led to followers’ feeling of empowerment as well as cohesiveness. A leader who exemplifies intellectual stimulation cultivates an environment of trust with followers by giving them opportunities to be innovative and creative, essentially communicating to the followers, “I trust you to get the job done—go forth and do great things!” Thus, transformational leadership focuses on the relationship of the leader to followers. By doing so, this type of leadership helps followers develop as better versions of themselves and thus raises the performance of the team or organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

The mechanisms by which transformational leadership is theorized to affect key mediators of performance are not fully understood. However, it is generally agreed upon that transformational leaders affect performance by increasing follower identification with the leader, promoting internalization of values, and increasing self-efficacy (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). This observation is consistent with the recommendation that militaries should leverage transformational leadership for the dual benefits of leader effectiveness and follower development (Watola, Lindsay, & Reimer, 2016).
While some criticize transformational leadership as ambiguous, elitist, and effective only in certain contexts (Avolio, 1999; Lee, 2014; Northouse, 2016), it continues to prove itself one of the largest studied theories and useful in many contexts around the globe (Chaimongkonrojna & Steane, 2015; Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, & Hu, 2014; Ghasabeh, Soosay, & Reaiche, 2015). Using the same search criteria as Judge and Bono (2000), a search of the PsychINFO database from 1990 to the present revealed 2,717 articles on transformational leadership compared to 969 for other prominent leadership theories (e.g., contingency theory, leader-member exchange, situational leadership theory). As Deichmann and Stamm (2015) demonstrated, when transformational leadership fails, it is as a result of leaders attempting to use it as a means to manipulate their followers rather than truly caring for them. Machiavellians, in addition to narcissists and psychopaths, as viewed through the lens of the Dark Triad of...
personality are known to undermine and derail leadership efforts (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Furthermore, this concept forms a link with authentic leadership—followers must believe that the transformational leader is truly engaged in helping raise the followers to their best possible selves.

**Authentic Leadership**

While transformational leadership focuses on ways to inspire and assist one’s followers to develop and grow in order to support the mission of the group, authentic leadership further emphasizes the need for genuine trust to exist from the subordinate toward their leader (Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011). This trust owes to the fact that the leader lives consistently according to his values (Gardner et al., 2005). Referencing a personal communication with Hannes Leroy, Gardner and Cogliser (2018) describe authentic leadership as an approach that “allows both the leader and follower to be true to the self and truthful with others” (p. 47). Northouse gives a model adapted from Luthans and Avolio (2003) and Gardner et al. (2005), and depicted in Figure 3, in which the authentic leader possesses self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (Northouse, 2016). Similar with Bandura’s (1997) emphasis on the topic (which I discuss later in the Behavioral Theory section), the concept of self-awareness in this model entails the leader’s ability to reflect on himself, his environment, and his followers to have a genuine, and continually growing, understanding of these factors. The importance of self-awareness as foundational to other aspects of effective leadership permeates leadership studies (Hannah & Avolio, 2010; Jackson, Lindsay, & Coyne, 2010; Northouse, 2016; Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Internalized moral
perspective describes the leader as consistently acting in ways that match her values. An authentic leader will possess balanced processing so that the leader can look objectively at issues or situations, take in other perspectives, and apply fair and consistent treatment. Finally, relational transparency refers to the leader’s propensity to be open and “real” with one’s followers, sharing the leader’s true self with them. All of these aspects serve to build authentic relationships between the leader and the leader’s followers, allowing for greater trust, growth, and performance (Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Figure 4. Diagram of authentic leadership theory

While some authors have criticized authentic leadership as merely being an extension of existing leadership theories such as transformational or charismatic leadership (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016; Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018), recent studies continue to show its relevance and distinctions (Anderson & Sun, 2015; Gardner et al, 2005, Walumbwa et al., 2008). Another criticism has been that
authentic leadership may not always prove effective in certain contexts or with certain people or groups, yet, as Gardner and Cogliser (2018) point out, exploring those barriers do not negate the theory but merely help better understand when and how authentic leadership proves most effective. For the purpose of this study, the way authentic leadership illuminates the importance of self-awareness, trust, and acting in accordance with professed values proves helpful in examining the role of the leader developer.

**Servant Leadership**

A servant leader puts his followers’ needs and interests above himself and seeks to make a better society in doing so (Northouse, 2016). A depiction of a servant leader can be found in the character of Maximus in the film, *Gladiator* (Wick, Franzoni, Lustig, & Scott, 2000). After finishing the final battle of the Roman war in Germania, Emperor Marcus Aurelius asks Maximus if he would take the honor of being emperor after Aurelius dies, to which Maximus replies, “With all my heart, no.” From his words and actions, Maximus’s motivation to lead springs not from selfish ambition or pride but emerges from his commitment to serve his fellow soldiers, his countrymen, and even the good of the world (he mentions the spreading of peace throughout the known world via “Pax Romana”—though perhaps misguided in his efforts, his intention is for the betterment of all).

Servant leadership emerged in leadership studies in 1970 when Greenleaf set forth the somewhat counterintuitive premise that leaders should put their followers first. As the name implies, this leadership theory focuses on the leader’s responsibility to serve one’s followers rather than view subordinates as serving the leader (Greenleaf, 1977). The leader should be one who empathizes and cares for the well-being of each follower
In fact, the leader’s focus is actually on the growth and development of the followers such that they become better versions of themselves. By doing so, the concept is that the team, organization, and even the world becomes a better place (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

Several researchers have criticized the servant leadership concept. Liden et al. (2014) suggest servant leadership places too high a demand on the leader (i.e. time, energy, financial, emotional) where the leader is either stretched too thin between competing stakeholders, or simply faces burnout and fatigue from overwork. In addition, some claim that servant leadership sacrifices advancement toward the organization’s goals because of placing too great a concern on followers (Anderson, 2009). However, in spite of these criticisms, many studies have shown the feasibility of servant leadership as well as the positive effect this way of leading has on both the climate and performance of a team or organization (Liden et al., 2014). Furthermore, research demonstrates that while authentic leadership is highly correlated with transformational leadership, servant leadership has significant utility and is distinct because of its emphasis on the leader as servant (Hoch et al., 2018). The leader’s concern for followers is critical in developmental contexts.

**Leader of Character Framework**

As mentioned earlier, the Air Force Academy’s Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD) produced the Leader of Character Framework (LCF) in 2011. This model more fully described what is meant by a leader of character and the method for developing such leaders of character (CCLD, 2011). While appearing in
chapter one of this dissertation (Figure 1), I present the LCF model again here for reference.

![Developing Leaders of Character](Image)

**Figure 1.** A framework for developing leaders of character at USAFA.

The LCF begins with the objective to define what exactly a leader of character is (2011). The answer lies in determining what a leader of character does in addition to who they are. As one former commandant of USAFA once emphasized, we cannot see inside someone, but we can judge what’s inside by how she or he acts (G. Lengyel, personal communication, January 2013). This reasoning is consistent with Aristotelian ethics and behavioral theory of psychology (Bandura, 1997). A behavioral theory of psychology matches this study’s working definition of leadership as a process of engaging others, i.e. skills, behaviors, and dispositions rather than a list of fixed traits or states of being (Sternberg, 2007). While there are demonstrated correlations between traits and leadership (e.g., Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhart, 2002), evidence across multiple studies indicates 70% of leadership is explained through experiences (Avolio & Hannah, 2008).
A leader of character lives honorably. The LCF defines a leader of character via three aspects of what they do. First, a leader of character, “Lives honorably by consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the Air Force’s Core Values” (CCLD, 2011). Those core values include Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do (United States Air Force, 1997). The LCF further outlines 11 virtues that are embodied in those core values. These include Honesty, Humility, Attention to Detail, and more. In 2015, the Air Force published a revised version of its “Little Blue Book” that outlines nine specific virtues, three associated with each core value, that are in the process of being incorporated into the LCF—however for the purpose of this study, the few changes in virtues has little effect on the research direction or implications. That a leader of character lives honorably reveals that such a person first starts with being someone who can be trusted to authentically live and act virtuously in accord with his values. Such a person is trustworthy and reliable, a person of integrity—the foundation of effective leadership (CCLD, 2011). Such an aspect in turn has at its root elements of authentic leadership theory (Gardner et al., 2005).

A leader of character lifts others. The second aspect of a leader of character in the LCF tells of one who “Lifts others to their best possible selves” (CCLD, 2011, p. 11). This concept, along with the third of elevating performance, extends the definition beyond merely being a “person” of character to a “leader” of character since they are also expected to influence others. However, rather than focusing on a transactional style of leadership simply to accomplish a goal or objective, leaders emphasize helping those they influence to become a better version of themselves. This aspect of a leader of character has at its origins servant and transformational leadership theories (Avolio & Gardner,
The LCF suggests that a leader of character must be focused on the good of the followers and helping them grow and develop as individuals in general as well as members of the team or organization. This type of leader makes an impact in the lives not only of their subordinates, but of all those around them, up, down, and across the group. This impact is made through the mechanisms of challenging others while also supporting them in their growth and development, much like transformational leadership’s individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In addition, through their words and actions, the leader of character inspires others to work to become better versions of themselves, much like transformational leadership’s inspirational motivation (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

**A leader of character elevates performance.** Not only must a leader of character be an authentic person of integrity who “Lives Honorably” and whose presence and behavior “Lifts Others,” the LCF proposes that they must also positively impact the overall mission of the team or organization. General Welsh, himself a powerfully transformational servant leader, was often known to emphasize while he was Chief of Staff of the Air Force that it doesn’t matter how well we develop our Airmen if we lose the next war (2013). General Welsh was explaining that to be a leader, one must influence people toward accomplishing a shared goal or objective (Northouse, 2016). Yet, a leader of character does not focus solely on helping a team or organization reach just any type of goal. Rather, the leader must “Elevate performance toward a common and noble purpose” (CCLD, 2011, p. 12). The leader of character’s influence must result in achieving a desired end state, but not their own objective or that of just a few, nor a merely transactional or “bottom line” goal. Instead, the leader of character drives the
team to more effectively achieve their shared and noble endeavor. Simon Sinek speaks similarly to this idea in his book, *Start With Why* (2011). While dollars may be generated or other goods and services result from the performance of the organization, the deeper “why” must be something greater than oneself and the organization as well, i.e. defend freedom, change the world, better people’s lives, etc. (Sinek, 2011). Leaders of character are themselves committed to such missions and engage in such a way that their followers and their teams reach toward this purpose outside of themselves, accomplishing something greater than merely advancing one’s own selfish ambitions. Yet again, the LCF clearly connects its model of how a leader of character behaves with attributes of authentic, transformational, and servant leadership as well as counseling theories (and more connections will be seen in the following sections).

**Developing leaders of character.** The LCF states, “Development is both a process and an outcome experienced by an individual (but never an end-state)” (CCLD, 2011). After giving a definition of a leader of character, the LCF then describes the process of developing leaders of character. This developmental process entails three aspects: own the pursuit of one’s own identity, engage, and practice.

**Own the pursuit of one’s own identity.** The first step in the process of development as a leader of character is to acknowledge that this is truly about growing in one’s identity as such. And in order to develop as a leader of character, the individual must own the process of growing in this identity (CCLD, 2011). The LCF outlines four important factors in such ownership. First, an individual must own one’s own attitude and effort (CCLD, 2011). Such a principle is highly rooted in Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy (1997), which asserts that an individual must believe he possesses the ability to
enact change or accomplish something, both within themselves and in the environment around them. Essentially, Bandura (1997) explains that without self-efficacy, a person will either give up at early signs of difficulty or even fail to make any attempts in the first place. A person must have both a positive outlook toward their development as well as be willing to put in the effort to grow as such. This concept reveals that developing as a leader of character is not something that is “done to you” but rather something you yourself do, even as you are engaged by others and the institution (CCLD, 2011).

Secondly, a person must own one’s duty (CCLD, 2011). As a member of the profession of arms, the leader of character must be willing to subordinate her or his own desires and needs for the organization’s and the mission. Freely giving up some autonomy in the context of taking on this identity becomes key to growth as a leader of character.

Thirdly, a person must own their commitments (CCLD, 2011). The LCF recognizes that only when a person commits to who she wants to be can she truly engage in the work of developing that identity. Also, this principle forms the context of establishing the environment for the institution to influence that person to live up to her commitments. This influence even includes what might be termed “tough love,” i.e. holding that person accountable when she comes up short.

Finally, a person who is growing as a leader of character must own his role in that development process (CCLD, 2011). As mentioned earlier, the LCF emphasizes that the individual must recognize that he has a role, the primary role, in his own development. George, Sims, McLean, and Mayer (2007) stress that “you need to take responsibility for developing yourself” (p. 2). No matter how great the organization or experiences
designed for him, if the individual fails to “show up” in the engagement process and do the hard work of learning and growing, he will never develop as a leader of character. These four aspects of owning the pursuit of one’s identity as a leader of character are critical prerequisites for the engagement and practice that will ultimately be the means by which a person develops as that leader of character (CCLD, 2011).

**Engage.** The CCLD proposes that both the individual and organization have a role in the cadet’s development as a leader of character, and that this development is accomplished through engaging in purposeful experiences (CCLD, 2011). First of all, a person must actively participate in intentional activities in such a way that she grows as a leader of character. Clearly, development cannot be merely a spectator sport, nor can it be something that just happens (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Purposeful experiences must be designed and engaged in that enable one to intentionally develop as a leader of character. It remains critical that the leader being developed not merely goes through the motions, as it were, but makes meaning of her experience in light of her own development and growth. This concept corresponds to Sensemaking Theory (discussed further in a later section) which explains how individuals gain information from their surroundings and experiences. From this information, how a person subsequently makes meaning from it determines how they will engage with information and experiences in the future (Zhang & Soergel, 2014). Thus, the “engage” portion of LCF is not a plan to “throw” what we can at the individual and “see what sticks.” Rather, from the planning of activities to the purposeful way in which one engages, intentionality leads to the desired growth. Rooted in this concept lie the Center for Creative Leadership’s (CCL) essential practices of challenge, support, and assess (Ting & Scisco, 2012). To help
someone develop as a leader of character, others of influence in the organization must begin by assessing the person’s growth, then challenge them to become and do more than they currently are, and at the same time support the individual such that they have the means to learn and grow through the experiences (Ting & Scisco, 2012). In this manner, a person develops through engagement in purposeful experiences where both the individual and the organization “show up.”

**Practice.** The final piece of the process of developing leaders of character is the need for the individual to practice habits of thoughts and actions consistent with the principles outlined in being a leader of character, i.e. one who lives honorably by consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the core values, lifts others to their best possible selves, and elevates performance toward a common and noble purpose (CCLD, 2011). CCLD’s “ARDA model” builds upon Rest’s ethical and moral decision-making theoretical framework (1979) by essentially rewording the four stages while keeping the same meaning. Rest (1979) outlined components of moral reasoning as beginning with interpreting the situation as moral, then defining the morally ideal course of action, followed by defining what one intends to do, and lastly executing the moral plan of action. Similar to Rest’s four stage model (1979), the ARDA model emphasizes that one must learn to become “Aware” of when an ethical or leadership issue is at stake, “Reason” about the best course of action to take, “Decide” to act according to one’s self-identity and commitments as a leader of character, and then “Act” accordingly (CCLD, 2011). However, the LCF adds a particular emphasis on the struggle to move from the third to the fourth stage of the model, i.e. from determining the right thing to do in a particular ethical situation and then following through with acting according to that
decision. The LCF pays special attention to the movement from the “Decide” to the “Act” stages by illuminating that this is often the part of the model where people fail to progress morally. Often, individuals will recognize morally problematic situations, reason through the issues, and decide on the right course of action, but then they fail to follow through and act accordingly. This “Decision-Action gap,” as the LCF describes it, becomes a critical point of emphasis where an individual must make that all important step from simply knowing what one should do, to actually doing it. Actually following through produces a reinforcement of those commitments and identity that enables an individual to be that much better at acting consistently with these values in subsequent situations. All the arrows in the model point multiple ways emphasizing the feedback loops and reinforcements of each aspect of the model (CCLD, 2011). The movement through this model is not designed to be restrictively sequential, moving from one stage to the next, never to return. Rather, the model highlights iterative and non-linear connections of experience among these aspects to continually solidify deeper and deeper the identity of the leader of character (CCLD, 2011).

Thus, the LCF provides a helpful model for understanding what a leader of character is and how to engage in developing someone as such. Yet, this framework also provides a common theory and vocabulary by which those engaged in the mission of developing leaders of character can integrate and align their efforts together in their shared mission. By doing so, CCLD (2011) gives a very practically useful tool for both the individual leader developer to use as well as the institution as a whole in helping form leaders of character.
Counseling Theories

AOCs do not serve as clinical counselors nor are they trained as such. However, the AOC Master’s Program incorporates education and training in developmental counseling as a means to prepare them for their unique role as leader developers of cadets. As two significant recent meta-analyses demonstrated (Cahill, Barkham, & Stiles, 2010; Stewart & Chambless, 2009), major counseling theories have proven largely effective in helping people change, grow, and overcome challenges, even documenting in these studies that the average patient at posttreatment was better than 83-93% of patients before treatment. Recognizing that cadets at USAFA experience rapid and substantial development as whole persons as well as forming their identities as leaders of character, the AOC Master’s Program includes study of the major psychological and developmental counseling theories particularly of the last century (J. Wehrman, personal communication, 20 March, 2019). These theories include, but are not limited to Motivational Interviewing (Herd, 2015; Miller & Rose, 2009), Chickering’s Identity Development Theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Lounsbury, Huffstetler, Leong, & Gibson, 2005), Solution Focused Theory (Gingerich & Peterson, 2013), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Gagné & Deci, 2005), and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tudge, 2017). While all of these theories and others have impact on developing the AOCs for their roles as leader developers, three prominent theories presented in the program over the three cohort years for this study included Person-Centered Theory, Behavior Theory, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT). Although other theories and models taught in the program also yield a host of benefits for the leader developer, the principles in these theories
specifically connect with the leadership theories already discussed in ways that shed a foundational light on the role of leader developers. Thus, the intersection of the ideas within these leadership and developmental counseling theories form the basis for the conceptual framework of a leader developer upon which this study is based.

**Person-Centered Theory and Psychological Safety**

In both counseling and educational development, the relationship between two people has often proven to be one of the key aspects in any major change in a person’s life, among other things (Clarkson, 1995). In fact, Martin, Garske, and Davis’ (2000) metanalysis of 79 studies demonstrated that the relationship between a therapist and the patient has a moderate but consistent positive effect on the outcome regardless of other factors or techniques. Carl Rogers, a renowned psychotherapist of the 20th Century, developed a counseling theory that revolved around this idea that the relationship between the therapist and client produced the greatest change and growth for an individual. Rogers stressed that the client must feel completely accepted and cared for by their counselor, a concept he termed as “unconditional positive regard” (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005; Sharf, 2012). Rogers insisted that the therapeutic relationship also include a sense of empathetic understanding by the counselor toward the client (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005; Rogers, 1975; Sharf, 2012). In fact, Rogers stated that empathetic listening is “extremely important…for effecting changes in personality and behavior” and is “one of the most delicate and powerful ways we have of using ourselves” (1975, p. 2). In addition, person-centered therapy placed similar importance on the genuineness of the counselor such that the client perceives the therapist as authentic. In the context of that environment, the client would be able to explore their
own issues, assisted by the counselor whose main goal was to establish the accepting environment and also to reflect back to the client feelings and thoughts. In this manner, the client becomes the expert in their own situation and the problem solver for their dilemmas. As evidence of its efficacy in helping people grow, Gibbard and Hanely (2008) utilized a study of 697 participants to demonstrate that person-centered therapy was indeed effective in facilitating change in individuals, to include even moderate to severe problems.

This type of mental and emotional security that includes a sense of trust, respect, and care for one another can also be called psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Psychological safety can be applied to many settings, from the educational classroom to the workplace and beyond (Edmondson, 1999; Weick, 1995). Psychological safety exists as a context (within a relationship or a group environment) where a person feels that they are accepted for who they are and whose worth is not judged solely on their performance. Consequently, when this condition of psychological safety is met, individuals are far more likely to learn from mistakes and grow (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). In contrast, learning and performance breaks down when leaders foster an atmosphere that is “more conducive to blaming than to learning” (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009, p. 723). As Rogers (1975) points out, when individuals feel the sense of acceptance and care for them within the context of developmental settings especially, they tend to flourish and grow far more than not.

**Behavior Theory and Modeling**

Earlier in this literature review, I discussed briefly the concept of self-efficacy in Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1997). This theory forms one of the foundations of
Behavior Therapy as applied to covert behaviors, or thinking and feeling, as well as overt or physical behaviors (Sharf, 2012). In order to change behaviors, a person must first develop self-awareness along with self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Thus, the counselor engages in helping the client understand themselves and their experiences with the goal of growing in “ability to accomplish significant tasks, learn from observation, believe that one can succeed, and have a low level of anxiety” (Sharf, 2012, p. 284). Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as understanding and improving the belief that one can do something as a change-agent, or possessing an internal locus of control. The four sources of self-efficacy include enactive mastery (success breeds confidence), vicarious experiences (seeing others do things makes a person feel she or he can too), verbal persuasion (inspiration and convincing), and physiological and affective states (certain physical and emotional ways about a person cause him or her to have more confidence). The behavioral therapist facilitates this growth through reinforcement and observational learning (Pajares, 2003). Likewise, Pina-Neves, S., Faria, L., and Räty, H. (2013) showed that individual as well as collective self-efficacy plays a role in students’ academic success.

Reinforcement in behavioral theory stems from the early years of the conditioning studies of B. F. Skinner (Sharf, 2012). While Skinner’s works were often criticized for making too great a leap from laboratory animal experiments to human behavior, the concept of reinforcement, especially with regards to opportunities to practice, remain relevant today. Using positive and negative reinforcement, therapists engage in “shaping” a client’s behavior, defined as “a gradual movement from the original behavior to the desired behavior by reinforcing approximations of the desired behavior” (Sharf,
For example, training wheels provide an opportunity for a child to learn the mechanics of riding a bike, practicing with enough help to learn basic balance before removing them and mastering the skill. Similarly, Stajkovic and Luthans (2003) found that when multiple methods of reinforcement are used in this manner, task performance increases.

In addition, behavior theory proposes the importance of observational learning or modeling. Bandura (1997) asserted that a person learns and develops by observing others, or what he calls vicarious experiences. Thus, if someone is interested in helping a person develop, modeling the desired behavior presents an important method of doing so. By seeing good examples of desired behavior, a person can then imitate those behaviors. Yet, the reciprocal concept is true too, however, and so a counselor, leader, or teacher must be cognizant and intentional not to model faulty behaviors.

**Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) and Sensemaking**

Cognitive Behavioral Theory operates on the foundational principles that a person’s thoughts and beliefs about themselves, others, a situation, etc., influence their feelings and behaviors (Butler, Chapman, Forman, & Beck, 2006; Grant & Wingate, 2011; Sharf, 2012). Because of this impact, examining one’s thoughts and beliefs about their understanding of themselves and their context serves as a useful means to improve behaviors and feelings. For example, if a person believes that his teacher dislikes him, he will likely interpret every graded event as a means for that teacher to punish him by giving a bad grade. This belief will tend to drive the student to avoid his teacher and likely spend less time preparing for tests or working on assignments. Consequently, these behaviors result in poor performance, and even more problematically, lessened
learning in the subject area and increased feelings of resentment toward the teacher and the subject matter.

Modern CBT formed primarily from the intersection of Albert Ellis’ Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) and Aaron Beck’s Cognitive Therapy (Beck, 2005; Grant & Wingate, 2011; Sharf, 2012). Therapists from a CBT approach to counseling utilize the acronym “ABCDE” in helping someone identify and change unhelpful behaviors, feelings, and situations (Sharf, 2012). Counselors use the acronym as a sequential process in addressing irrational beliefs and understandings of themselves and their experiences. Clients can then address these problematic beliefs and instead look at themselves, others, and their experiences in a new and helpful way that will instead lead to better behaviors and more positive consequences. As Beck (2005) pointed out, “in its simplest form, the cognitive model suggests that people’s perceptions of situations influence how they react” (p. 17). Essentially, the key to this counseling method lies with helping clients understand how they are making sense of their experiences and adjust their sensemaking to improve the results.

The ABCDE model can be described by examining each of the letters in the acronym in turn (Sharf, 2012). “A” stands for the activating event, or the situation or action that causes a response in the client (usually negative and thus the client is wanting help to address it). “B” stands for the belief behind the issue or how the person makes meaning of the event or experience. “C” stands for the consequences that follow, either internally or effects on others. “D” stands for disputing the irrational belief, a step in which the client confronts the problematic way of understanding the event or experience in order to replace it with a more helpful and productive way of viewing it. Doing so
leads to the final letter of “E” which stands for the new, and hopefully positive, “effect” in which such a changed perspective of understanding an experience has on the client.

Helping clients through this process of ABCDE in CBT assists them in understanding their own metacognition, or how they think about what they think about. By doing so, the counselor helps the client address their “schema” or lens of beliefs through which the person views themselves, others, and the environment (Butler, et al., 2006; Grant & Wingate, 2011; Sharf, 2012). Essentially, this process provides a means of helping someone address her way of making sense of her experiences using such techniques as Socratic dialogue (Clark & Egan, 2015). In other words, CBT engages in a person’s sensemaking.

While the terms sensemaking or sensemaking theory are not often explicitly discussed in CBT literature, the concepts appear linked. Zhang and Soergel (2014) describe sensemaking as “creating an understanding of a concept, knowledge area, situation, problem, or work task” (p. 1734). While many specific theories of sensemaking exist which seek to explain how a person makes sense of different situations and experiences within different contexts, fundamentally they all focus on a two-step process of how a person senses (perceives, notices, or takes in) information and how that person then attributes meaning to that information (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Weick, 1995; Zhang & Soergel, 2014). Just as the counselor uses the “ABCDE” method of CBT to help a person change their understandings of their experiences to improve their feelings and behaviors, sensemaking theorists address how people, individually and collectively, make meaning of information to better achieve the desired outcome. The idea of schemas or sensemaking as the lens through which individuals view and interpret their
experiences becomes vital later when contemplating effective behaviors of a leader
developer.

In summary, the counseling theories of Person-Centered Theory, Behavior
Theory, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory taught within the AOC Master’s Program
illuminate important concepts regarding how to help someone develop and grow.
Specifically, Carl Rogers’ Person-Centered Theory emphasizes the need for an individual
to feel psychologically safe in order to grow. Likewise, Behavior Theory reveals the
importance of good modeling and practice in a person’s development. Finally, Cognitive
Behavioral Theory demonstrates how a person’s thoughts and beliefs affect their
sensemaking of their experiences and how pivotal addressing these lenses are to helping
someone learn and change. Thus, I draw on all three of these counseling theories for this
study.

**Conceptual Framework**

The leadership theories discussed in this review (Authentic, Transformational,
Servant and the CCLD’s LCF model) stress the importance of a leader in developing their
followers. In addition, the related counseling theories (Person-Centered, Behavioral, and
CBT) also complement these models in emphasizing ways to help someone else grow
personally and interpersonally. Consequently, logic seems to suggest that a leader who
emphasizes some of these characteristics would also be one best suited to develop
followers into leaders themselves. Such a conclusion, however, then begs the questions:
How does a leader developer best develop other leaders? Is it the same behaviors and
dispositions as simply being an effective leader? Or do certain ways of leading better
assist in developing other leaders? And how do we prepare a person to be effective as a
leader developer? As Crissman indicated, “merely being a good leader does not necessarily make one a good leader developer” (2013, p. 13). However, neither Crissman (2013) nor any other studies that I have found focus their research specifically on how to be this “good leader developer.” This study sought to answer these questions. Such answers have particular value for the Air Force Academy whose primary responsibility is to develop leaders of character. By extension, the other military academies can benefit from such research as their missions are nearly identical. Furthermore, beyond the military, this research has potential benefit for the civilian sector at large since there is such a large number of leadership development efforts being engaged across organizations within education, business, government, and other sectors. Hannah & Avolio (2010) discussed how organizations in the U.S. spend over 10 billion dollars annually on leadership development without evidence of their effectiveness, so the principles learned from this study may inform and bolster these efforts to develop leaders.

While obtaining an exhaustive list remains likely impossible, or at least beyond the scope of this dissertation, I make some propositions regarding how leader developers are effective and how to prepare them to be so. Yin (2014) asserts that case study research “benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p. 17). Thus, based on ideas embedded in the literature, and especially CCLD’s LCF, my personal experience as an AOC and working in CCLD, I propose the following concepts as key to a leader developer: Sensemaking, Modeling, and Psychological Safety. All three of these concepts come from theories and concepts contained in the leadership and counseling theories discussed in this literature review and are particularly relevant to CCLD’s framework for developing leaders of character.
Figure 5 presents the initial rationale and design of this study showing by virtue of the question marks what the study is aiming to understand—namely what makes an effective leader developer and how best to prepare leader developers.
Figure 5. Study rationale and design.
Based on this study design, Figure 6 then shows the overall conceptual framework for a leader developer at USAFA in the context of this study.

*Figure 6. A conceptual framework for the leader developer at USAFA.*
The diagram above illustrates the conceptual framework I used when examining the concept of a leader developer and how to prepare a person for such a role, specifically within the context of AOCs at USAFA. The diagram is best understood working back from right to left. The far-right large block outlined in blue shows what a leader of character is and how to develop one as defined by the LCF. The block just to its left (and in the middle) shows what is hypothesized as making an effective leader developer—the one engaged in developing someone else as a leader of character. Moving back one more step, the far-left block shows how USAFA prepares its officers to be effective leader developers utilizing the AOC Master’s Program and its combination of leadership and developmental counseling classes and experiences. Informing these ideas are the leadership and counseling theories and models that are not depicted but discussed in this dissertation. The block on the bottom left summarizes the three research questions into two main categories of questions guiding the study—namely what makes an effective leader developer and how do you prepare leader developers. This block points to the method of research to study this topic—a qualitative case study of AOCs at USAFA. The following paragraphs will explain more fully what is meant by sensemaking, modeling, and psychological safety as they relate to being an effective leader developer.

**Sensemaking**

Schwartz (2018) illuminates the need for leaders to engage in the “intentional process of reflecting” (p. 36) especially with someone else to help see themselves and their experiences from another lens. In this manner, that person learns to make sense of her experiences in light of her own development as a leader. What may have seemed like a simple task becomes a lesson from which she can grow as a leader as she learns to
make meaning within the context of her new lens. Such meaning making or sensemaking is critical in the LCF stages of owning the pursuit of one’s identity as a leader of character as well as engaging with purposeful experiences (CCLD, 2011). Weick (1995) stressed the critical connection between a person’s identity and how he makes sense of his experiences. In other words, not only will a person’s experiences shape how she views herself, but her identity will also shape how she interprets her experiences (Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). Thus, helping a developing leader make sense of who they are and what they are going through as it relates to their growth as a leader proves essential for a leader developer. In addition, transformational leadership’s intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation accomplishes a similar emphasis since the leader developer encourages their people to tie the parts to the whole and see themselves and their experiences as part of something bigger. Thus, the effective leader developer helps the person see his experiences within the context of his own development as a leader of character.

**Modeling**

As emphasized in behavior theory, modeling serves as an important way to help someone develop and grow in skills and behaviors (Bandura, 1997). At CCLD there is a common phrase that is used: “Let’s show them what right looks like.” Transformational leadership’s tenet of idealized influence stresses this concept since the leader acts as a role model both in specific tasks, but even more importantly in living out the shared values of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Similarly, authentic leadership’s focus on integrity and trustworthiness of the leader reinforces the necessity of modeling desired behaviors and ways of being. As Martin et al. (2015) pointed out, trust and role-
modeling serve as key attributes in the leader-follower relationship and even suggest that it is all the more important for the leader development strategy. Thus, a leader developer must ensure that she model for her follower the very behaviors and values in which she wants them to grow.

**Psychological Safety**

Schein & Schein (2018) describe the need for leaders to foster a psychologically safe environment of relationships amongst followers such that the followers will not hide problems but instead will want to discuss them and subsequently grow from them. As seen in the counseling theory of person-centered therapy, demonstrating true empathy and care for someone else fosters this sense of psychological safety (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005; Rogers, 1975, Sharf, 2012). This type of environment comes from a humble leader (Schein & Schein, 2018) and one who practices transformational leadership’s individualized consideration and truly cares for his subordinates (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Servant leadership’s emphasis on putting subordinates’ needs over the leader’s (Barbuto & Hayden, 2011; Greenleaf, 1977) and the LCF’s aspect of engaging with support (CCLD, 2011) both reinforce the need to establish psychological safety of followers where they know they are cared for and supported.

**Summary of a Leader Developer**

A leader developer sees beyond the specific tasks in the “means” to the “ends” of development of their people and helps their followers make sense of their experiences (*Sensemaking*). Likewise, a leader developer is authentic and models what they teach and profess (*Modeling*). Finally, a leader developer engages with their followers in such a way that the followers feel cared for and safe to grow and learn from their mistakes as
well as successes (*Psychological Safety*). In examining how the AOC Master’s Program develops leader developers, this study hypothesized that those classes and experiences that best help the AOCs grow in these areas would likely prove most valuable to the AOCs themselves.

This leader developer conceptual framework shaped the research study in a number of ways. First of all, the framework demonstrated the propositions upon which the data in the study shed light. Secondly, the leader developer framework informed how I collect data, focusing on those words, things, and experiences that relate specifically to being an effective leader developer, especially in light of the principles laid out in the leader developer framework. Thus, a flexible and semi-structured interview protocol initiated discussion but also allowed for follow-on questions to dig deeper into the aspects of being a leader developer. Similarly, observations and documents were chosen based on how they related to the framework, either overlapping or contrasting with it. Finally, the framework explained in this section served as the initial lens through which data analysis was conducted as I expected to see some themes align with the elements described within it or contrasting in unexpected ways as well. Thus, using the leader developer framework (Figure 4) to explore my research questions into the topic of being and preparing to be an effective leader developer led me to the research methodology and design outlined in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The research for this dissertation followed a case study design in which qualitative data was collected and analyzed. From these data, applicable findings related to the research questions were generated (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013). Using qualitative data in this manner helped shed light on what Air Officers Commanding (AOCs) perceive are the important aspects of being a leader developer and how the AOC Master’s program prepares them to act as such. This chapter outlines the specific research strategy that was employed to address the research questions surrounding the role and preparation of leader developers at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), discussing case selection, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and limitations.

The concept of “leader developer” and what makes one effective in this role of developing leaders of character poses difficulties in conducting a quantitative study. Primarily, the reason for this quantitative challenge emerges because to date there exists no explicit definitive definition (or even theory) of the qualities, behaviors, or attitudes needed to be an effective leader developer, particularly one within the context of USAFA. Furthermore, because of this lack of clarity, no quantitative measurements have been created to assess these skills, behaviors, or dispositions. As Yin (2016) points out, qualitative research offers greater capacity to explore topics constrained by “the unavailability of sufficient data series or lack of coverage of sufficient variables” (p. 6). Consequently, it seemed necessary to conduct an exploratory study into how leader developers understand and experience their roles in order to find out what might be the qualities that are most important.
Since “qualitative procedures are applicable to virtually any real life, field situation” (Marion & Uhl-bien, 2001, p. 413), these qualitative methods lend themselves to helping explain the role of being an effective leader developer by mining the rich experience of those actually engaged in this challenging work (Creswell, 2013; Yin 2016). Qualitative research can serve as the “occasion for developing new concepts” (Yin, 2016, p. 10) which makes it ideal for exploring the unexamined concept of a leader developer. Additionally, qualitative case study research is best suited to address “how” or “why” questions regarding a set of events or experiences (Yin, 2014), such as the research questions this study sought to explore.

Therefore, I employed a case study research design, conducting interviews, observations and document reviews of USAFA AOCs who are either in the midst of the AOC Master’s Program or have graduated from it and are serving in command. Doing so allowed for an in-depth look at the experience of AOCs as leader developers while allowing for those most familiar with the subject to provide their perspective and experience in shaping the understanding of this crucial role and preparation in developing leaders of character. Thus, this study explored the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of AOCs at USAFA, what dispositions, behaviors, and skills make for an effective leader developer?

2. How do AOCs at USAFA perceive the AOC Master’s Program in preparing leader developers?

3. According to AOCs at USAFA, how should the program evolve to best equip AOCs to be leader developers?
Case study research is ideally suited for this study since it focuses in-depth on a specific experience, situation, or phenomenon as it occurs in its real-world context (Yin, 2013, 2014). This methodology of research lends itself well to descriptive and exploratory analysis which provides key insights into an occurrence or situation that has well defined boundaries (Creswell, 2013). The role of a leader developer at USAFA, and the AOC Master’s Program which is used to prepare for this role, serve as the “specific experience, situation, or phenomenon” being explored. Yin (2014) describes that exploratory case studies may still be guided by propositions and can lead to “hypothesis-generating” that helps understand a phenomenon and identify ideas for further study (p. 147). Conducting an exploratory case study (Yin, 2014) in this setting with AOCs allowed for close examination of what the participants believe makes them most effective in their role as leader developers as well as how they were prepared to perform this unique and important role.

Since case study research “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points,” the investigator must rely on “multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 2014, p. 17). Accordingly, my dissertation study utilized case study methods of interviews, observations, and examining documents (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014) to gain the level of detail needed to truly understand the experience of AOCs as leader developers. In addition, Yin (2014) also points out that case study inquiry “benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p. 17). In fact, Yin (2014) goes on to assert that “articulating a ‘theory’ about what is being studied and what is to be learned helps to strengthen a
research design when doing case study research” (p. 26). Thus, I utilized the conceptual framework of a leader developer described in chapter two of this dissertation to guide my research for this study.

**Research Methods**

The following section outlines my data collection and analysis strategy for conducting a qualitative case study examining AOCs’ understanding of their role as leader developers and their perception of how the AOC Master’s Program prepares them for this role. The study utilized interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2013) to gain the level of detail needed to truly understand the phenomenon of a leader developer from the perspective of AOCs themselves. I describe the research setting and participants as well as the specific methods to collect data including interviews, observations, and document reviews. I then discuss how I analyzed this data to find common themes and also any significant variance between specific sub-categories within the sample.

**Research Site and Participants**

Case study research focuses on looking in-depth at a specific experience, situation, or phenomenon as it occurs in its real-world context (Yin, 2013) through descriptive and exploratory analysis which provides key insights into an occurrence or situation that has well defined boundaries (Creswell, 2013). The boundaries of my particular study reside in specific time and place as well as the experiences of a number of participants in that setting. The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) serves as the place where this study was conducted. USAFA is a public institution of higher education located in Colorado Springs, Colorado, providing a bachelor’s degree and
commission as an officer in the United States Air Force (USAF) to each of its graduates. USAFA’s mission and vision statements indicate that its primary objective is to develop leaders of character (Silveria, 2018; USAFA Strategic Plan, 2015). As such, its faculty and staff are primarily leader developers above and beyond their specialized roles and responsibilities for their specific position (i.e. academic instructor, coach, commander, etc.). Particularly, the role of the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) focuses fully on fulfilling this role as leader developer and they are sent through a one-year education and training program called the AOC Master’s Program. In this program, the AOCs earn a Master of Arts degree in Counseling and Leadership from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) in partnership with USAFA (and with many of the courses taking place at USAFA). The AOC Master’s Program is a unique program at USAFA and allows for close examination of what the participants learned and developed that they feel apply well, or not so well, to their mission of developing leaders of character. This qualitative study examined what makes an effective leader developer and how best to prepare someone for that role.

I utilized a purposeful sample (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006), which entails gathering participants based on their ability to shed light on the phenomena being studied. The participants of the study consisted of 22 AOCs at different experience levels in their roles at USAFA. At any one time, there are 20 AOCs in the AOC Master’s program, and 40 AOCs serving in command of a cadet squadron (20 AOCs serving in their first year in command and 20 AOCs serving in their second year in command). I collected and used data from AOCs across this three-year spectrum of experience levels at USAFA spanning the years 2016 to 2019. As Fontana and Frey (2000) emphasize, interviews of
participants are meant to understand a phenomenon rather than explain it. Since selecting the number of participants includes balancing breadth and depth (Hatch, 2002), and the exact number of participants is always a struggle of costs and benefits, this study interviewed 22 AOCs, utilizing a number well above the minimum of 12 as recommended by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) for saturation of themes. 22 participants represented 36 percent of the AOC population at any one time at USAFA and allowed for a rich depth of description while also accounting for variance in their understandings of the topic as informed by their experience. Thus, the recruiting strategy employed involved sending an email to the AOCs at USAFA inviting their voluntary participation in the study. I was able to get a breadth of experience levels from those in the AOC Master’s Program, those ending their first year in command, and those ending their second year. While I had hoped to get 8 to 10 participants from each of the three experience levels, I ended up having 10 who were in the cohort year, 9 who were in or had just completed their first year in command, and three who had either finished their command tour or were in the final months of finishing their second year in command. In addition, I took demographic data so that I could notice any similarities or differences between like groups within the sample. The demographic data included gender, ethnicity, specific career fields within the Air Force (also called Air Force Specialty Codes or AFSC), and commissioning source, i.e. USAFA, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and Officer Training School (OTS). Since a person’s experiences help determine how they behave, understanding not only the participants’ physical characteristic demographics were important, but I also wanted to examine any variance
based on their career fields and how they were developed as leaders in their commissioning source (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Demographics of participants.
Data Collection

Rubin and Rubin (2005) pointed out that “the purpose of interviews conducted as part of elaborated case studies is to find out what happened, why, and what it means more broadly.” Accordingly, I conducted a case study aimed at better understanding, from the perspectives of those who must accomplish the unique role of being a leader developer, how the AOC Master’s Program prepared AOCs to be leader developers. This method included interviews, observations, and document reviews.

Interviews

I conducted up to two rounds of semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) utilizing my purposeful sample (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) with the AOCs individually (Appendix A). The interview protocol was built using concepts outlined by Creswell (2016) to include using open ended questions, keeping main questions to less than 10, and ensuring to add “probes” (or requests for more detail from the participant). The first interview averaged approximately 60 minutes long, and if a second interview was able to be conducted for further clarification, it was also approximately 60 minutes in duration. The plan was to conduct observations between the interviews in order to guide additional exploration of the topics discussed and observed. Unfortunately, I was only able to get five secondary interviews. However, these provided helpful insights into how the AOCs thought about their roles and the program over time. Despite the benefits they provide, I avoided focus groups and group interviews due to the risk of “group think” and other “problematic speech” that those methods of data collection can involve (Hollander, 2004). Rather, each individual interview focused on gathering that participant’s view of
what makes an effective leader developer and the ways in which the AOC Master’s Program prepared them for such a role, as well as ways they recommend changing the program to best prepare AOCs. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) point out, “Qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied” (p. 15). This approach revealed the essence of how the AOCs saw the program’s strength and weaknesses in preparing them to be leader developers as they understand that role to be. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed before conducting analysis to ensure the participants’ ideas were presented accurately (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

**Observations**

It is important to understand the context in which a study is to be conducted, even before doing interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Yin, 2013), thus I performed observations surrounding the interviews of many of the participants. This allowed for understanding real life examples of what the participants described in the interviews. I planned to do two observations of each AOC interacting with others regarding developing leaders (either by actually engaging with cadets or engaged with other faculty/staff concerning the topic of developing leaders). However, only 14 participants were able to provide me with a chance to observe them. The goal was to conduct these observations after the first interview and before a subsequent interview in order to get more explanation and expanded insights into what the participants view as effective for leader developers. However, I was only able to observe in this manner three of the five participants who had a subsequent second interview. The other AOCs were simply observed after their interview. Activities being observed were military training
activities, classes, meetings, and other events. I had full access to the Cadet Area at USAFA and coordinated these observations with the staff leadership.

**Document Review**

In addition to interviews and observations, I conducted a review of pertinent documents for each of the AOCs relating to their ideas around how to develop leaders. Bowen (2009) defined document analysis as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (p. 27). The emphasis of my reviews was on “discovery and description, including searching for contexts, underlying meanings, patterns, and processes” (Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2010, p. 128). I asked the participants to provide up to four papers they wrote in the AOC Master’s program that they felt demonstrated some aspect or aspects of how they understood the concept of being a leader developer during the program. This method allowed for further understanding what ideas were germinated from the AOC Master’s Program in conjunction with what was elaborated in the AOC interviews.

**Data Analysis**

The following sections outline my data analysis strategy used for conducting the research. Since the study utilized case study methods of interviews, observations, and examining documents (Creswell, 2013), a general but flexible plan was helpful in conducting the analysis of the data (Yin, 2012). As Yin (2012) stated, “Collecting actual data may lead to changes in this plan, but having an initial plan that needs to be revised (even drastically) may be better than having no plan at all” (p. 16). The analysis of the data was continuous even during the initial phases of collecting the data (Hatch, 2002).
This ongoing analysis process allowed for the rich in-depth themes to emerge that are consistent with case study method (Yin, 2013) and provided the level of detail needed to truly understand how well the AOC Master’s Program prepares AOCs to be leader developers from the perspective of the AOCs themselves. I describe the general process as described by Yin and Creswell that I used and link it to my conceptual framework of a leader developer (Figure 2).

**General Data Analysis Plan**

Since the utilization of case study research provides an in-depth look at a specific experience, situation, or phenomenon as it occurs in its real-world context (Yin, 2013), the procedures of analyzing the data collected must help reveal this deeper understanding. As Yin (2012) pointed out, there is no “cookbook for analyzing case study evidence” (2012, p. 15). Yet, there are some general methods recognized as useful. I utilized the concept of pattern matching when looking at my data (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2012). Yin (2014) described pattern matching as the process which “compares an empirically based pattern—that is, one based on the findings from your case study—with a predicted one made before you collected your data” (p. 143). Thus, as I began to organize and code the data, I kept in mind the construct of the proposed themes in my conceptual framework, for comparison and also contrast purposes, allowing inductive codes to arise throughout the process. Therefore, I began by organizing the data, defining the codes within the data, noting patterns, and then finally organizing those codes into themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2012). Throughout the process, I engaged in constant memoing to capture the evolving understanding of the topic as presented by the interviews, observations, and document reviews (Strauss, 1987). As
Rubin and Rubin pointed out, “analysis is not a one-time task, but an ongoing process” (2005, p. 15).

Creswell (2009) pointed out that one must organize and prepare the data for analysis by transcribing, typing up notes, and sorting. Next, I read through all the data to get general ideas and impressions, noting these things as I did so. The third step I employed was to code the data by labeling categories with a term, often a term using the actual language of the participant called an *in vivo* term (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). Codes addressed topics that were expected, topics that were not anticipated or unusual, and those that addressed the theoretical framework.

Using the theoretical framework of a leader developer described in chapter two, a combination of predetermined codes (*Sensemaking, Modeling, Psychological Safety*) were anticipated, however, emerging codes were developed as they arose (Creswell, 2009). Much of this initial coding derived from my experience as a previous cadet decades ago, a former AOC myself, and having worked with other AOCs and cadets at USAFA for the past seven years (I will address this in my limitations section to follow). I utilized Dedoose coding software as a means to code data and categorize those codes.

Since my research questions were focused on the AOCs’ perspectives of the program, I started my coding with the participants’ interviews. Next, I coded the document reviews to understand what they found were important from the program from their own words. Lastly, I coded the observations of their interactions to see how they are in line with what they had said, either reinforcing that data or generating new ones.
Coding

The development of themes began first with data coding. However, before I began the process of coding, I wrote a brief summary after transcription of what ideas stood out to me. My coding process then entailed an initial first cycle coding utilizing both the predetermined codes and adding in vivo codes based on the participants’ words (Saldaña, 2015). Secondly, I read through more thoroughly in the context of other data already collected in interviews, observations, and documents, then recorded overall patterns that appeared. Next, I compared these with my ideas for codes to see if there were any connections or where they deviated. Fourth, I did a thorough read of all material, performing initial coding as I went. Following, I noted patterns that arose, and those began to form the basis for my themes in my memoing (Creswell, 2009). I then went back and re-examined codes in light of these as I continued to transcribe new data, setting up for a second round of coding, since, as mentioned, coding is an iterative process, before eventually arising at the final patterns that formed the themes from the data.

The second cycle of coding involved combining some codes in simplifying language and placing child codes under larger code concepts. These child codes were sub-codes that fit within the larger ideas of the main codes (Saldaña, 2015). Then, I produced a final culmination of codes into themes based on patterns identified within the data (Creswell, 2009). Also, the coding was examined through peer review by another researcher in the field to help ensure reliability and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2016). Lastly, when I present the data in the next chapter, I give all quotes verbatim exactly as
spoken or written by the participants and the word *sic* will not be used within the quotations.

**Trustworthiness and Limitations**

Trustworthiness of a qualitative study must be established in order for its findings to be seriously considered by the reader. Yin (2016) emphasizes that the concept of trustworthiness deals less with debating over the “truthfulness” of the data and more to do with building credibility through the methods for collecting, analyzing, and representing the data (p. 86). In order to do so, I will address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1986).

To begin with, credibility is parallel to the quantitative research concept of internal validity and answers whether the study truly demonstrates and measures what it is claiming to do, i.e. Can we have confidence in the study? (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In order to enhance credibility, I engaged in member checking, or the action of having my data representations checked by the actual participants themselves to ensure accuracy (Hatch, 2002). I accomplished this throughout the interviews through reflecting back what was perceived to have been said in order to be either affirmed or corrected. Next, I address the quality of transferability which is akin to the quantitative concept of external validity. Essentially, transferability deals with how well the findings of the study may address other situations in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I accomplished this by ensuring that my report has thick and detailed description as seen by the numerous quotes and descriptions of observations in chapter four. Creswell described detailed description as an author describing what they see “in situ, that is, within the context of the setting of the person, place, or event” (2013, loc. 3509). I accomplished this thick description by
ensuring that my presentation of the data includes not only details of the interchange itself, but significant amount of details concerning the setting in which these data gathering moments take place.

The third aspect of trustworthiness that I addressed is dependability, which relates to the quantitative concept of reliability, or how consistent are the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I ensured dependability by submitting my work to an external audit, a review of my procedures and report by other experts in the field.

The final concept of trustworthiness I ensured was confirmability, which deals with the need to see how a researcher’s process and data led logically to the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I addressed this concern by triangulating, or “establishing converging lines of evidence” (Yin 2012, p. 13). This was a key part of my data analysis to ensure that the categories and themes that emerged were true to the data and context being studied. I helped establish confirmability through three different types of data collection (i.e. interviews, document reviews, and observations) as well as having 22 total participants in the study.

Lastly, I must address the anticipated limitations of my study. First of all, while case study research provides for a rich and in depth understanding and description of a situation and its context, it does not present a comprehensive view, but only the view as seen in and through the participants of the study. In addition, my study is limited to participants who are currently at USAFA, and while this gives a current perspective of AOCs in that role, it lacks the inputs and views of others such as the cadets themselves and the leadership in charge. Finally, I have had to engage in bracketing myself by acknowledging my inherent biases and presuppositions and seeking to see the data
through a fresh lens (Creswell, 2013). I approached this study from a philosophical framework informed by postpositivist critical realism (Creswell, 2013; Trochim, 2006) which emphasizes that while certain objective realities exist, our perceptions of that reality are shaped by our experiences. Thus, I took the approach of trying to best understand the AOCs’ experiences from their perspective while acknowledging that I as the researcher inevitably see their stories through a lens shaped by my personal experiences and beliefs. I have been both a cadet and an AOC previously, as well as spent over 10 total years of my life affiliated with USAFA. It is from these experiences that has arisen my desire to study this program and how it relates to the concept of a leader developer. For this reason, I endeavored to use deductive codes from my conceptual framework but also allowed for inductive codes to emerge. In accordance with my tendency toward critical realism (Creswell, 2013; Trochim, 2006), I suspended my bias as much as possible and mitigated its confounding the study by constant and continual member checking in real time during the interviews while also having external auditing occur while I collect, analyze, and prepare the data for presentation.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study addressed three research questions: (a) from the perspective of AOCs at USAFA, what dispositions, behaviors, and skills make for an effective leader developer?; (b) how do AOCs at USAFA perceive the AOC Master’s Program in preparing leader developers?; (c) according to AOCs at USAFA, how should the program evolve to best equip AOCs to be leader developers?

Themes

This study gathered data from 22 participants (12 AOCs in command and 10 AOCs during their cohort year of the master’s degree program) utilizing interviews, observations, and document reviews. Analyzing the 27 interviews (1,485 minutes), 31 document reviews (243 pages), and 18 observations (970 minutes) revealed over 1,381 significant statements and pieces of information (or “excerpts” as Dedoose calls them) that were assigned 301 significant codes. Based on their meaning, similar statements and actions were clustered together and specific themes were assigned or developed. Overall, seven key themes (see Table 1) emerged from the data. Figure 8 displays a word cloud representing the initial codes used in analysis while Figure 9 shows the major codes that most often appeared after the additional rounds of analysis. Nevertheless, while these word clouds represent occurrences of the codes within the data, they were not the sole means for determining a code or theme’s importance. Rather they were included as additional tools that help identify those things that were important to the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).
Figure 8. Word cloud of initial codes.

Figure 9. Word cloud of major codes.
Saturation of major themes was achieved as anticipated based on research by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), likely due to the sample’s large percentage of the relatively small population size. Though more participants may have revealed additional subtle nuances of the themes, it became clear that the key major themes surfaced relevant to the research questions. Thus, seven key themes (see Table 1) emerged from the data.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Exemplar Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disposition of a leader developer</td>
<td>Desire to see others develop as leaders</td>
<td>“It’s wholly my responsibility as an AOC to help them develop, to learn and grow.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>Helping followers make meaning of their experiences in light of their own development as a leader</td>
<td>“It’s trying to get them to think bigger about what the objective is.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Being a living example of what is being taught</td>
<td>“If I am not demonstrating what I am asking them to do then I’m not doing my job as a leader developer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological safety</td>
<td>Feeling cared for and supported while being challenged through the “messiness” of development</td>
<td>“development is messy, and someone who is willing to be in that mess with somebody else, knowing that it’s not a specific script, but it’s a process that’s potentially different for everybody and who’s willing to be there and listen and help through that journey.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely valuable program</td>
<td>The AOC Masters Program as experienced by the AOCs was highly valued in preparing them to be leader developers</td>
<td>“Overall, I thought the year we went through, it was a very good program and made us all much more prepared to go in as AOCs and lead.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The counseling aspect of the program was exceptional. And I think 100 percent across the board you’d have AOCs that’d agree counseling is put into effect day one on the job, and then used pretty much every day to some level as an AOC.”

“The counseling aspect of the program was exceptional. And I think 100 percent across the board you’d have AOCs that’d agree counseling is put into effect day one on the job, and then used pretty much every day to some level as an AOC.”

Some changes needed

The program is excellent but could be changed in some ways to enhance its effectiveness in preparing AOCs

“lots of good, right, lots of good, but missed opportunities”

Themes 1-4: The Effective Leader Developer

The first four themes discovered through the study revealed what makes an effective leader developer. These topics include having a proper disposition of a leader developer, an ability to help the cadets make sense of their experiences as means to grow as leaders themselves, modeling what it is desired from the developing leaders, and providing a psychologically safe context in which to grow as a leader.

Theme 1—Disposition of a leader developer. Throughout the interviews especially, the AOCs remarked time and again concepts that revealed the belief that a leader developer must have an attitude and mentality suited for the role—one that focuses on the development of others. The need for this tailored disposition stems from the AOCs’ agreement that a leader developer role includes more than simply being a leader. One participant described this difference when he said,

Operationally at the end of the day, you’ve got to get the mission done and then if you can do that and take care of the people and you can spend time really developing them that’s great and that’s important but its tertiary or secondary to
the operational mission that you need to get done. At the Academy, we’re building a foundation for these young airman to lead our airman and so they are our mission. This is the only opportunity, the only time, where our mission is our people.

The AOC went on to explain that there are a few AOCs who fail to make that transition from simply being the leader and commander to being a leader developer as an AOC, a special kind of commander. He remarked that these AOCs are the ones who struggle the most and are the most ineffective in the primary mission of developing the cadets as leaders, not merely getting them to obey orders and perform. They see themselves simply as “commanders and that’s what their role is as commanders—to enforce discipline and to bring the operational flavor” to their cadet squadrons. However, he stressed that while that is part of an AOC’s role,

that is not the primary mission. The primary mission is to develop them holistically and to take care of their wellbeing and make sure that they’re ok, that they’re learning, growing, and developing. So, I think that mindset as far as up front, what is our role as AOCs and how does that, I don’t want to say differ, but how is that different than the [regulation] as far as a commander’s roles and responsibilities. They’re complementary but I think that the foundational approach is a little bit different in the training environment in so far as the role that we do.

In summary, a cohort member wrote that “Success is in the cadets learning, not squadron performance” and that being effective as a leader developer begins with the “transition
from being just the leader of your squadron to developing leaders of your squadron”—embracing the identity of a leader developer was critical to being effective as an AOC.

**Desire for and focus on development of others as leaders.** Because of the unique aspect of the leader developer role and specifically within that of being an AOC, the participants emphasized the need for those who fulfil these roles to have a desire to be there and engaged in the mission of developing leaders of character. Every AOC who volunteered for this study testified that they were also a volunteer to be an AOC in the first place. While personal factors such as family reasons and the like influenced their motivation to apply for the position of an AOC, every participant described some degree of desire to develop others as leaders and officers. As one AOC put it as she smiled satisfactorily, her job is “helping others learn how to lead.” One paper written for a counseling class during the AOC Master’s Program described the writer’s desire for developing others and how it is linked to the Person-Centered Theory of Carl Rogers (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005; Rogers, 1975). “Like Rogers, I have a strong personal interest in helping people change and grow.” For AOCs, to be effective as a leader developer, they needed to start with a desire to help others develop.

In fact, the sub-theme of the leader developer’s focus on others’ development as leaders of character resounded so often, it became an *in vivo* code in the study, or a code that was labeled using the language of the participants (Creswell, 2009; Saldaña, 2015). This code was labeled “Not about me.” To put it simply, one participant explained, “I thought about it a lot during the cohort year, how I was going to have those conversations, and continually checking myself at the door and going this is *not about me*
In fact, the AOCs saw their focus as needing to make others better even than themselves. As one commented,

I don’t think there’s a better goal than to send out lieutenants that are better officers than me, or better officers than when I was a second lieutenant. We want leaders that stand on our shoulders so that they can raise up leaders and develop leaders that stand on their shoulders, so there’s a legacy there and I feel like I’m a part of that. That’s how I see it. I think you have to have a long-term view as an AOC. Yes, you have to be tactical in the here and now, but you have to see them as a captain or lieutenant colonel later as certain attributes in what they’re doing.

Thus, to be an effective leader developer, AOCs described their personal desire for the growth of others over their own agendas or accomplishments.

Likewise, interviews revealed a recognition that the growth process takes time and the leader developer must have patience when focusing on the cadets’ development and making them even better than the leader developer her/himself. In the words of one participant, the AOCs needed to know “that we are probably going to have to do the same conversation a couple different ways, to find something that works for them, or to reinforce it until it stays.” The leader developer must be patient and must be able to tolerate the ambiguity and repetition required for each leader they are helping develop to learn along their own leadership development journeys. That same AOC later expressed that they must keep in mind “that it’s probably going to take a while and it’s going to be a little bit different for everybody,” concluding that they must be “ok with that.”

In addition, a cohort member linked this “not about me” mentality that a leader developer needs to possess with the concept of a growth mindset by articulating that
“when I look at growth mindset, it means you're not closed off from information. You're willing to accept other people's opinions, and thoughts, and theories that may be contrary to what you believe or what you think you know.” Part of the reason these individuals are so open to learning, she explains, is because they don't feel like they have it all. And so, when I say it's not about you [as the leader developer], it's almost like you have to be selfless to have a growth mindset in a sense. You're open to receive different things, and I feel like people who are selfless are open to receive. They're open to receive different people, they're open to receive different ideas, different perspectives, opinion, views, experiences, backgrounds.

This openness and growth mindset was a foundational concept shared by many AOCs as vital to being effective as a leader developer. The AOCs expressed this need to have a passion for developing others—an attitude of caring for the growth of others. One participant showed emotion as she explained, “Not because I required it but because they decided it was the right thing to do, and at the end I started tearing up because, I mean, I was like, I’m so proud of you; you didn’t have to do this…That tells me that you're prepared.” Seeing the cadets grow and develop meant a great deal to the AOCs.

However, while there remained a consensus on the need to have a developmental focus and disposition as a leader developer, one area of variance among the sample of participants appeared between members of different commissioning sources with regards to the concept of taking the longer view in development. Figure 10 demonstrates a difference in number of times the code “Long term view in development” showed up in the three types of commissioning sources for AOCs. While those AOCs who were
commissioned through ROTC and USAFA had nearly the same number of occurrences at 42% and 44% respectively, OTS commissioned AOCs accounted for only 14% of the code occurrences. These numbers have been normalized through Dedoose accounting for the difference in number of participants from each of the sources. While more opportunities for additional interviews would allow for a more accurate understanding why this variance may have occurred, time and conditions did not allow for further exploration during this study. Instead, one hypothesis that could be tested in future research may be that OTS graduates are used to leadership development over a shorter timeframe from their experience in their pre-commissioning source (three months) while USAFA and ROTC graduates have experience with much longer developmental programs (four years). While the variance seen here may simply be a coincidence, yet it may instead result from ROTC and USAFA graduates being predisposed toward longer views in officer development. Further research would shed more light on this interesting phenomena in the data.

Figure 10. Frequency of code occurrence for “Long term view in development”

Challenging but rewarding. Whether they were currently in command, reflecting back on their experience in command, or in the AOC Master’s program cohort, the participants expressed that being a leader developer as an AOC is hard but rewarding. After she took a deep breath, one AOC remarked that being an “AOC is a really tough job.” Another cohort member described the role of a leader developer by saying, “It’s a
huge responsibility—it’s actually quite intimidating…I’ll be the first to, like I’ll straight up manly say it: I’m scared.” Others shared this acknowledgement of the gravity of the role and the reality that doing so is extremely difficult, to include one AOC who said that “helping others learn how to lead,…I think it sounds really simple, but it is definitely a lot harder than it looks on paper, because…it’s really easy as a commander to tell your people how to do stuff, but it is much more difficult to watch them squirm through the process…I think it’s a lot harder than people make it out to be.” An AOC in the middle of her command corroborated this idea commenting that it is a “lot harder than it looks: not just telling them how to lead, but helping them through the process of learning to lead.”

Not only did the AOCs discuss how challenging the role of being a leader developer is, they also remarked how unappreciated it is (as well as the AOC Master’s Program in general). “And yet this experience is not valued the same as going directly to command and those operational experiences,” remarked one AOC as he reflected on his desire to be an AOC and how he was counseled against doing so since “it's going to end your career.” As he paused and reflected on that, the frustration was clear in his face and his voice as he stated, “it doesn't make sense… because we talk about development in the Air Force and we thought it was kind of a universal idea, but it is not a necessarily a universal priority.” Many expressed along with one cohort member that “folks see it as 120 people that could ruin their career,” yet, as he elaborated that I hadn't even considered that as a possibility. Not to toot my own horn or anything. Maybe it's just pure ignorance, but it was one of those where that just
wasn't the mentality. I'm coming into it like they're not trying to ruin me. I'm here to try and help them, right?

Yet, even with the acknowledgement that the role of a leader developer is very challenging and difficult, the participants who had experience as AOCs unanimously expressed that it was also extremely rewarding. One AOC reflected back on his time in command at USAFA and commented that “it took a lot out of me. It took a lot of flesh, a lot of time, and I was ready to be done by the end of it,” yet, he also declared that “I loved it. It was the best job I've ever had in the Air Force.” Another remarked, “I really enjoyed my time as an AOC…I am just grateful for the opportunity.” Likewise, one AOC mentioned that the role of leader developer was “very satisfying” because he was able “to find those moments where I can help somebody mature, and to be worthy of that responsibility.” This responsibility of being a leader developer proved rewarding to the AOCs because, as one explained, “You can never go wrong if you're making a difference in their lives.”

**Humble and teachable.** In order to make this difference in the lives of others where they “learn, grow, and develop” as leaders, the AOCs discussed and demonstrated the importance of being humble and teachable themselves. One participant who was reflecting back on his time as an AOC a year later remarked that “part of being a leader developer…[is] we have to be lifelong learners...the concept of being a lifelong learner is really important.” He explained that “If we think we’ve got it,” then such an attitude would result in failing to grow and thus failing to make an impact on the cadets. Thus, the AOC reiterated that “an understanding of that is so foundational to maximizing your year in the cohort.” The seasoned leader developer went on to clarify that “whether it’s
individual counseling and learning and growing in that or whatever class you’re a part of” the question to ask oneself is “How can I take this material” and apply it to being a leader developer; “How does it help me learn, grow, challenge me as an individual that I can apply as an AOC or as a leader in general?” The AOC further explained that the problem arises when someone has the mentality that

I’m already a great leader, I got here because I’m a top 10 percenter, I’m a great leader. I’m already ready to go be an AOC. I just feel like that mindset is so toxic to what we need to get out of the year and just in general.

AOCs expressed time and again that a leader developer cannot be arrogant or unteachable.

Instead of a fixed mindset or an attitude of pride that thinks there is nothing I need to learn, the graduated AOC stressed that one must adopt a teachable disposition that says I can always learn, I can always grow, I can always get better, and how am I gonna…be on the court here to maximize this. And I think that does two things: 1. it helps you to learn and grow to help you prepare to be an AOC, but 2. it also models to those cadets how to develop as a leader of character, that that’s a mountain with no top, that that’s an endless process, and it, to me, that is what really helps people learn and grow, that when they realize that…every day that they need to always be looking at how to get better. To me that’s pretty foundational in the program.

Another AOC remarked that “It’s why I wanted to come here. It’s still why I want to be here, and it’s to develop with the cadets.” The AOC further explained that “It’s not me imparting whatever knowledge and experience, I mean that’s part of it, but I’ve learned a
lot from them as well, and they kind of inspire me.” Thus, AOCs valued teachability in themselves as well as in their cadets.

The role of a leader developer as an AOC was described by many participants as a “unique command opportunity,” and many lamented with one who said “I think we do it a disservice almost by claiming the AOC's are kind of a little command thing, because it is, kind of, but on a different scale. It's so much more than you get with a different command opportunity.” This is because AOCs saw their role focusing on the development of other leaders as being so challenging and yet so critically important to the mission of the Air Force as a whole.

Because of the vital and difficult role leader developers play, one AOC reflected back on his time in command and the role of a leader developer, and he asserted that “how you select [AOCs] is really important. And making the assumption that, this is a very dangerous assumption, that because you've been an effective officer in your career field, or a top-tier officer, is necessarily going to make you a top-tier AOC, or an effective AOC is a very, very bad assumption.” Another AOC who had just finished his two years in command and was about to leave for his next assignment summed up his thoughts in the following quote regarding the AOC Master’s Program’s impact on him and the importance of selecting officers with the right disposition for being a leader developer:

It confirmed what a lot of people told me before coming here, putting it on my dream sheet, that it’s not good for you. Um, but it’s the difference between doing what you love to do because I do like being an AOC, and doing what the system values, and big Air Force does not value what we do. Fair? [Chuckles]. That’s
how it changed me. It redefined my life. It made me a better person. But I would only recommend it to someone that has…their ego in check, otherwise they will suffer a lot of disappointment which I believe will lead to bad cadets…squadrons that are not so well led. I mean I have peers in my AOC cohort that I can point to that are like that. I hope I didn’t do that. I hope I got over myself and grabbed on to the original piece that I want to do a pre-commissioning source and make better lieutenants and I hope I did that.

Clearly, both cohort members and AOCs with experience agreed that there is a particular disposition needed for leader developers, one of humility, teachability, and focused on the development of others as leaders.

**Theme 2—Sensemaking.** AOCs talked about a desire to help their cadets “get it.” One AOC summed up this shared passion when he said, “To be fair some of the best moments of this job are when they get it.” AOCs described this as a foundational goal of theirs, not merely having their cadets do what they were told because they had to, but understanding their experiences in the greater context of their own growth and development as a leader. Another AOC discussed an example of helping his cadets make sense of the feedback system as an opportunity for personal growth as a leader rather than simply a painful, unfair situation: “I just opened their aperture up a little bit in that way.”

Likewise, an AOC was observed helping debrief his cadre of cadets at the Leadership Reaction Course in Jack’s Valley, a series of obstacles designed to provide experiential learning opportunities for basic cadets to learn principles of leadership. During the debrief, the AOC asked purposeful, open-ended questions to help guide the discussion toward a deeper examination of what happened in the context of the leadership
development of those involved. Thus, he asked questions such as, “What would be a good question to ask in this situation?” The cadets initially wanted to focus on how to help the basic cadets think about better ways to get the particular task accomplished, but the AOC helped them see that their job as cadre was to help the basic cadets instead think about how they were behaving as leaders and followers and a team. The AOC helped them make sense or meaning of the obstacle and task using metacognition, or *how* they thought about what they were experiencing instead of merely thinking about *what* they were experiencing. By doing so, the AOC was able to help the cadre cadets see how to help the basic cadets do the same. The AOC both modeled the principle of sensemaking as well as helped them learn it by experience that “the debrief is where they learn the most about themselves.”

A leader developer was described as seeing these types of opportunities all around them to help their cadets make meaning of their experiences in this way. One AOC discussed that these moments are found in both the formal and informal situations afforded at the Air Force Academy when he explained, “Any one of those potential avenues for conversation can be an opportunity for leadership development.” Conversations were consistently mentioned, and observed, as the means through which AOCs would help their cadets make sense of their experiences in order to “learn, grow, and develop,” but not simply one-way lectures. Instead, the AOCs asked open-ended, thought provoking questions in a Socratic manner that opened the doors for their cadets to think through these concepts themselves. In essence, they not only helped the cadets make meaning of their particular experiences in the present, but they taught them ways to think through things and make sense of them. As one AOC described a specific example
of this, she said, “And then if they get to that answer themselves and lead it themselves, you have gotten them to be those who develop others in leading themselves.” Thus, AOCs sought to help their cadets to grasp the greater lessons of leadership development and their roles as leaders for others.

Illustrating the concept for helping the cadets make sense of their experiences at the Academy within the context of their own development as leaders came from an AOC who stressed that such opportunities happened all around him, not just formal, but the informal opportunities.

That shows up in a lot of different ways, and you know and remember anywhere from someone coming into your office on the brink of tears emotionally, handling whatever kind of issue it might be that’s on their heart. It shows up formally in our leadership courses, you know like in the summer in Jack’s Valley. That’s a leadership position, right? So, it’s intended to develop leadership, and so whether its informal and just the stopping by your office, or the formal process and everywhere in between I think there’s huge opportunity for leadership development.

The AOC went on to describe this principle using three examples:

So for instance at the ring dance, I’m there with [my spouse]…And while we were waiting in line for the pictures, we were talking to one of my rising firsties, soccer player, was very sharp cadet, we were introduced to her date, her boyfriend who I’d known to be [Cadet 2], for a long time over the last year that they’d been, he’s a second lieutenant, so they’re dislocated as far as that’s concerned. So I’d known [Cadet 1] for a long time, I had just met [Cadet 2], but then come to find
out that [Cadet 2] is, is a former Air Force quarterback and so to dive into kinda that relationship and just to kind of be introduced to him and to see what he’s working on out of Wright Patterson and kinda the cool things he is doing as a second lieutenant and then just kinda go down that path as far as report, you know, very cool, what do you want to do next in the Air Force, you know, and he’s talking about how he’d love to work on some project management type stuff, and he’d love to come back to the Air Force Academy, so he asked questions on how, you know, we were able to become part of the staff here at the academy. So, it wasn’t per se just kind of specific leadership development, but it was I think more of that kind of this mentorship role which I still think falls under the umbrella of leader developer, as far as how that’s defined. It also gave us just a great understanding of more of [Cadet 1], the female in the relationship just to kind of fully, more fully know what she’s going through with her relationship with [Cadet 2] so that I could be a better AOC to her as she goes into her firstie year, you know and kinda help just be a part of that relationship in more of a formal fashion.

The AOC finished this story of his informal teachable moment with the cadets and proceeded to tell a second example of being a leader developer and helping his cadets make sense of their experiences in a way that contributed to their growth as leaders. This time, the example consisted of a situation in Basic Training as the AOC described, other examples, more formal, on the courses last summer out of Jack’s Valley. Being able to see [Cadet 3], he was the outside linebacker for the football team. He was the courses commander last year. Very charismatic personality, easy to
stand up and take charge of the entire 197 cadre. And so he’s got a lot of just
skillsets that are just natural talent. It was neat also to just kinda shape that
throughout the three weeks that we were working with him, because he’s like a
bull in a china shop, you know? He’s coming in all, you know, emotion,
motivation, etc. And then to be able to kinda talk to him, whether it’s kinda up on
the top of the assault course as basics are going through and say [Cadet 3], what
do you think about this process, what do you think about how the certain courses
are going, you know and just kind of allow that conversation to go down that path
and help shape, not just how the courses are working, but kinda shape how he’s
going about his leadership on the courses. So not super specific, but that was a
great example from last summer.

After explaining how he helped develop his cadet leader in a more formal role in a
training scenario, the AOC gave one last example of sensemaking as a leader developer.

Another one that has been significant is…we had a suicide ideation from one of
my two degrees female this last year, and to see her in the E.R. at her breaking
point and in the next six months to kind of be a part of her informal counseling.
She was obviously seeking a session to help us out. But to kinda see how that
process had been evolving, to be a part of that. She’s turned out to be one of my
strongest firsties, super capable cadet, and to help her through that process to not
just allow her to get better, but to allow her to get confidence with her own coping
abilities which I think ultimately will directly contribute to her effectiveness as a
leader. So those three come to mind off the top of my head.
The AOC went on to describe how opportunities exist in both formal and informal structures to help cadets make sense of their experiences so that they grow in their character and leadership development.

I think there’s infinite amounts of those processes that this institution just creates by virtue of what it is. I think also that the formal opportunities, whether it’s leadership opportunities on the athletic fields, for you know intercollegiates or just club type sports, whether it’s a summer research opportunity, BCT opportunities, squadron commander positions during the school year, any cadet position that you have in a squadron are the more obviously formalized positions that create certain outcomes that I think are more measurable than the informal ones. However even with those formal positions, I think there’s also an infinite amount of opportunities to again, transfer to that informal leadership development, so, I think USAFA does a very good job as far as presenting leadership development opportunities, and then it falls under the responsibilities of the people involved, whether it’s the AOCs or cadets to pursue the infinite amount of informal leadership development opportunities, if that makes any sense at all?

The final question is almost ironic since the AOC was describing the concept of sensemaking, yet it is profound since he highlighted how a leader developer and the institution Engage with the cadet among the purposeful experiences in order to help them develop as a leader of character (CCLD, 2011).

AOCs discussed the importance of their focusing on the cadets learning the greater lessons of leadership instead of merely focusing on the immediate performance of
tasks as ends in themselves. Instead, those tasks became the means to the end of growing as a leader of character. A participant described this focus saying, “I think leadership has its light bulb moments, it’s small things that go in their toolbox and if we can give some of those to cadets that they take out on the active duty, then they’re better leaders for it. Because we can get them to march and do everything right, doesn’t mean they’re gonna go and be good leaders.” The tasks such as marching had value for cadets insofar as they provided a means to develop as leaders, not merely in their being accomplished as tasks by themselves.

Another AOC described how teaching the cadets to employ this type of sensemaking “will benefit them in the future,” and in particular he gave an example that “first semester squadron commander…she realized it and she made a comment to me later in the semester and she said, ‘I realized why you always forced me to have these hard conversations with people, it's because you want me to learn.’ And, I was like, ‘Absolutely.’” Others discussed the need to give a “bigger perspective.” One cohort member said that “the biggest thing is providing a guide, more than anything else. Or like be a coach. You know, you can't do everything for somebody and expect them to truly develop, right?” To the AOCs, being a leader developer meant helping the cadets grasp this greater sensemaking of their experiences through guided conversations and experiences.

Open and intentional conversations were the means by which AOCs engaged their cadets in helping them make sense of their experiences in such a way as to grow as leaders. In a follow-on interview at the conclusion of his AOC tour, one participant reflected on how these “life-changing conversations are so unique to the Academy, I
think, and the development environment,” and that there are “exponentially greater opportunities at the Academy in that environment.” He stated that “those conversations, absolutely I would say are the core of what gave me the most meaning or purpose in the job.” Intentional coaching conversations proved critical to the AOCs in their role of a leader developer.

Part of sensemaking that showed up in the data related to being teachable, as discussed earlier. As another AOC described, “to me is so important, the concept of being a lifelong learner is really important.” The AOCs talked about needing to help the cadets be open to learning, to seeing things in a new light, referencing their own experience in the AOC Master’s Program as having helped them with this. This concept of being teachable and a lifelong learner was important for both the leader developer as mentioned earlier, as well as the leader being developed.

Theme 3—Modeling. The AOCs described and demonstrated the high value they placed on modeling for the cadets what they ought to be and do. One AOC talked about this concept in the context of being an Air Force officer, and that the cadets will learn a great deal of what that should look like by watching him. A cohort member discussed how she believed one of the keys to being effective leader developers was to “model what you preach.” Thus, the AOCs talk about not taking that responsibility lightly, and even in showing that they do so, they help influence the cadets to do the same concerning their roles as leaders. One paper written by an AOC in the master’s degree program summed it up by saying, “Modeling is the heart of what we do.” Another AOC from a different cohort said “It is not, do as I say. It's, do as I do.” Similarly, his cohort-mate expressed modeling was a key aspect of being a leader developer too her since
“[a]ctions speak louder than words.” Others stated that cadets “learn by observing” and that “It’s all about setting an example.” In a follow-up interview with a graduated AOC, he explained that modeling became critical to his identity as a leader developer during the cohort year.

I was really big on modeling. Whether we like it or not, we're always modeling. That was kind of my mantra for the year. Kind of like the whole Charles Barkley, you know he said "I'm not a role model." It's like, you don't get to decide that bro. It's in the little things. Is what you're doing on a daily basis match what you're saying with your lips?...I thought it was important, it's more of a reminder for me that the cadets are looking to me as their commander and leader, and to ensure that my actions are my words, that they match and to be able to apologize when I've missed the mark because even in that, I'm modeling what it looks like to make things right when I've made a bad decision. And like I told the other AOC's, no matter what, you're modeling.

However, the emphasis on modeling was not only important for this AOC during the cohort year during their master’s degree program, but he explained how modeling what being a leader of character looked like continued to be an emphasis of his throughout his time in command of a cadet squadron following the degree program.

In addition, the AOCs expressed through both interviews and documents that they cannot merely talk about what their cadets should do, but they must act that way as well and “model the things that I want them to do.” Every interview and observation included AOCs whose dress and appearance were well within standards, and whose mannerisms constantly exuded professionalism and pride in being an Airman. However, while
uniform standards and customs and courtesies were highlighted as important things to model, their discussions went beyond those things to the deeper ideas of leadership—developing and living these things out in all situations. One AOC described this aspect by stating, “If I am not demonstrating what I am asking them to do then I’m not doing my job as a leader developer.” Later on, he explained that “the other side of it that I think is even more profound is that I try to demonstrate that in how I interact with them and how I serve them. So, what greater way can I show them, um, how to be a leader, influence them rather on how to be a leader than by demonstrating it for them.” To the AOCs, modeling proved foundational in their roles as leader developers.

Since modeling was important, one cohort member in particular, emphasized how she saw that it would be vital for her to model how to be an effective leader amidst the demands of both career and a personal life. As a woman, this was doubly important to her to model for the female cadets, and she wrote about it in her papers as well as discussed it in her interview.

I do not want to be the person who stays at work until 8:00 p.m. I want to make it overly apparent to them. I can be good at my job, and I can care passionately about my job, and my family, too. And a key piece of that, that really worked well, and I take it from me, in my last assignment, was merging the two. So that's part of hoping that my new group commander is cool with that. Aware that sometimes, if I'm here earlier in the morning, I'm going to have a four-year-old with me. Or late in the evening. And I think that's cool for the cadets to see, too. Like if I have to come in and help somebody out with something, or do interviews in the evening, my kid might be hanging out in the office. And it's good for my
kid, as well, to know that, "Hey, look. My mom is doing something important, and I'm part of this." And some day, hopefully, all of them will be motivated for those same reasons, because they see somebody who's good at every ... well, I'm not trying to say that I'm good at everything. Everybody has to work at what they do. But, like, somebody that can do all of these things, and be happy. The only way I do that is by being efficient. I can't waste time at work. Like, I don't come to work to sit around and bullshit. Which I know, there'll be times whenever cadets do want to just bullshit, and there's value in that, too, whenever it's focused on their development, and they need somebody to vent to. But they'll be aware that I have other things going on, too. I think that's important. And I know, the current squad, or, the current AOC has cadets over at his house every week. So that'd be a cool thing, too, for them to see that. Since that's important to me, I want them to see, "Here's how you do it."

Male AOCs spoke of similar desires to model how to be a leader not only professionally but personally with a family as well. One AOC remarked, “I wanted to be an example for the cadets to see, not just the officership, but what it is like to have a family and how to be a family man and be a husband and see that interaction with my boys.”

In addition to work-life balance, AOCs also mentioned the need to model effective officer-enlisted professional working relationships to the cadets by how they interact with their Academy Military Trainer (AMT). One cohort member said beyond “modeling what does it look like to look, to act like, to speak like, to carry yourself as an officer,” but also that
modeling occurs both with the AOC-AMT team, and that portrays to the cadets what interactions look like or should look like within the realm of officer-enlisted corps members in the military that are working together for a common purpose…I think that is essential as an AOC, to not overlook the modeling opportunity that you have. And it's more of an indirect way that I think that you are developing leaders.

This indirect means of helping the cadets develop as leaders proved essential in the minds of the AOCs.

Time and again, AOCs wrote about, discussed, and demonstrated the concept of modeling as a key ingredient to being an effective leader developer. The AOCs saw their role as modeling what a leader of character looks like both professionally and personally and also how to develop one’s self and others as such.

**Theme 4—Psychological safety.** While discussing what it means to be a leader developer, AOCs mentioned how important it is to create a context where the cadets could learn to lead. This included things such as building authentic relationships with the cadets where the AOCs would “meet them where they’re at.” This concept of being able to listen to truly understand someone else included ideas of increased empathy and care for their followers, focusing on knowing them and where they were coming from developmentally and individually in order to help move them along in their growth.

Trust became a resounding theme in the interviews, documents, and observations. One leadership development paper explained, “Establishing trust, especially in an educator-learner relationship, is fundamental to the learning process.” As one AOC put time and again in both his original interview and his follow up interview a year later after
he had finished his command, “The goal is to help them learn and grow and develop.”

The AOCs emphasized that the cadets must also know and trust that that was their goal, not to control them, but to help them develop. The same participant remarked that for this growth and development to occur, the cadets must “trust that your goal is to make them better.” As a cohort member similarly wrote, “I genuinely care about my cadets beyond their experience at USAFA and in the Air Force. I want them each to live a full and wholesome, valuable, rewarding life no matter how long they serve.” An AOC further described how “one important part of that [development] is to understand and acknowledge the individual stuff, like where they’re at.” He went on to give an example of how he did this.

So for instance, I have a three degree. He’s a soccer player about to be a two degree who, he really focuses on soccer, and that’s what he cares about so part of developing him as a leader is connecting with him where he’s motivated. How are you going to be a better soccer player? What are the things that are going to help you do that and how are there opportunities up on the hill and in the classroom and in the squadron that will help you in that arena and will help you in the long term. So, helping him get perspective on why they want to holistically develop not just in one area. So, I think part of how you view that is acknowledging where their focus is and expand their horizons or perspective a little bit.

Thus, knowing his cadets, to include their motivations, and making sure they knew that he cared for them and their development was a key ingredient to the psychological safety required for the cadets to learn and grow as leaders.
The concept of trust between the leader developer and the leader being developed was consistently mentioned within the context of “empowering” the cadets to practice leading themselves. Just as Jung and Sosik (2003) demonstrated that transformational leadership was predictive of feeling of empowerment, so this study found that AOCs empower their cadets through providing them an environment safe for them to learn and grow by experiencing leadership. This involved, as one AOC put it, making “course corrections” as they inevitably struggle through the difficulties of leading themselves and others. One paper described that the foundation of that AOC’s leadership development philosophy relied on the principle that “Cadets will learn best if they are given real responsibility, instead of being taught to rely on their AOC to make decisions.”

One cohort member quoted in his paper from Owens and Hekman (2012) that "Leader humility at the most basic, fundamental level appears to involve leaders catalyzing and reinforcing mutual leader-follower development by eagerly and publicly [...] engaging in the messy process of learning and growing" (p. 801). As the exemplar quote from an active AOC mentions in Table 1, the leader developer had to be able to embrace the messiness of development without overreacting or seeking to control, but challenging, supporting, even disciplining in a way that the cadets could trust that they were being cared for by their AOC. The data resounded with the concept of how one goes about disciplining, training, and developing their followers that builds that trust and enables them to grow. One AOC summed this concept up like this:

So I kind of look at it some ways as like a parent, right. So, do I need to discipline my children to make sure that they learn, grow, and be the best people they can be? Absolutely, but how I do it is incredibly important. So, do I need to
yell at my kids, do I need to tell them that they’re bad people or that they’re this or that they’re that, or do I focus on the facts and make sure that that trust is there and also really think through where they’re at and what do they need to get back on track, what do they need to get better, how do WE as a team do that. So, it’s an us thing, how do we do that, not you. So, all of those things are little ways that you build trust and you ultimately create an environment where they truly believe that you’re there to help them.

The AOCs sent a resounding message that how they engaged with the cadets, to include how they disciplined them, must be in the context of a psychologically safe way that was for the betterment and growth of the cadets.

It became apparent from the interviews and observations that standards mattered to the AOCs. These were not individuals who were lackadaisical concerning accountability and expectations. One AOC expressed a similar sentiment of tough love toward his cadets by sharing the following:

I had several cadets who made some pretty poor decisions so they found themselves in my office having that awkward conversation. I was trying to convey [that] I am here for you. I'm going to support you in very conversational friendly tone, but here are your consequences. I recommended one for disenrollment, another one I can think of for underage drinking for a pretty serious probation, long probation, a lot of tours to march and reflect upon their actions. I would like to think that at no point did they feel it was a personal issue or the fact that I hated them, because I absolutely didn't. There are just certain behaviors and actions we can't tolerate. I hope that they saw that. I know they
weren't real happy about that. One of them eventually became a squadron commander after I left the squadron. I like to think they grew up a little bit. These cadets who were disciplined with a “tough love” style by their AOCs actually responded by learning and growing as leaders.

One cohort member wrote in a leadership philosophy paper how they planned to use both transformational and transactional leadership in helping ensure cadets meet the standards of the institution, ultimately describing that his role as an AOC is also as a gatekeeper to the profession

Transactional leadership will typically be employed where transformational leadership has failed. Consider the example of a cadet who has failed to overcome academic probation and does not seem to be putting in the effort. Where empowerment has failed and performance standards are consistently missed, the fundamental goal of graduating prepared Second Lieutenants must be upheld. Transactional behaviors such as punishment will be administered, and if ineffective, lead to dismissal.

Clearly, the AOCs were not afraid of holding cadets accountable and enforcing standards, yet they expressed that they plan to do so in a way that was more transformational if possible. It is almost as if when the AOCs described being transactional, they would do so in a transformational way—in essence, they would transact transformationally.

Yet, the AOCs described their role as an evaluator, disciplinarian, and even gatekeeper from a perspective of care for the individual as well as the organization. One said that he would “care for them all the way out the door,” should a cadet fail to meet standards academically, physically, or in the conduct required of an officer candidate as a
leader of character. One cohort member discussed this concept in how to discipline within a psychologically safe context for the individual to learn and grow by differentiating between the person and the action and how to relate to either one.

Well I think it somewhat goes back to what it is that you are being kind to, and what are you holding accountable. So, I think that being kind to is the person, whereas holding accountable is the action that the person made. And those two at all times need to be differentiated within any group that you're working with. It's the same sense with my kids, where they can mess up as many times as they want, and I will love them no less, and I will think of them with no less value. At the same time, they will be held accountable for mistakes that they make, and will learn and grow through those. But in the same sense that the cadet squadron commander has no more value than the fourth classman, who's struggling. They have the same value as a cadet. And they're entrusted with different aspects and held accountable for different things, based upon their development, what they're entrusted with. But the person in and of themselves is never the one that is being reprimanded; it's that action that's reprimanded. So, I think that's the differentiation that allows both to coexist.

By separating the action as being bad or a problem from the person, the leader developer was able to provide a psychologically safe relationship where they could be supported in who they were while being corrected in how they were behaving.

The participants reiterated the importance for their cadets to know that their AOCs were not just there to control them through punishment or other means, but to help them grow in “transformation and commitment.” Another AOC said that this happens
“because I think the relationship already existed where they knew that we saw them as individuals and that we were giving them something that was actually going to develop them rather than some brute force, archaic punishment.” The AOCs shared this idea that “I want them to be better than me and better than they think themselves possible. Failure is a part of that but will not be regarded with fear, but rather as a crucial part to growth and learning.” Again, the AOCs understood that the process of development would include failure and be “messy,” yet they would endure and embrace the process in order to help the cadets better develop as leaders and as persons.

An excellent example of an AOC employing the concepts of trust, tough love, meeting the cadets where they are, and caring for the cadets even in disciplining them was illustrated so well by the following leader developer’s story with a cadet.

I had a female two degree who had nothing on her record bad at all and then it was brought to my attention in Feb that she had a motorcycle. So I brought her in my office, um, asked her about it, she admitted to me that she did have a motorcycle, we talked about it, I gave her a direct order to either transfer the title to her parents or sell it and not to ride again till graduation. She promised me that she wouldn’t. And then I, on graduation night where she’s becoming a firstie, I get a phone call from the command post asking if I have a cadet ____ in my squadron, I said yes, and they said that she had been arrested on a motorcycle going over 100 miles an hour up in Woodland Park. Um. And so, you know, I’m like yes, where’s she at, so I call to find out what’s going on. My initial reaction was, I was really mad, I was like I gave you more on the lenient side, still a category 3 [type of punishment], but I gave you more on the lenient side because
of extenuating circumstances, you were forthright, and you promised me that you
weren’t gonna do this, and I took it kind of personal when I was at my house and
with my wife, and my wife said something kind of profound, she said, babe
you’re taking this personally, she’s not meaning it personally toward you. She’s a
young lady who made a poor decision, um, and you need to remove all of your
personal emotion toward it and figure out how to best help her get what she needs
to out of this situation which was really helpful for me. So, I went to pick her up
from jail. She’s literally in jail, she’s in a jumpsuit. And I’m able to get her into a
private room where my AMT and I are able to talk to her. She comes in and she’s
just crying. She’s upset, she’s scared, she’s worried that I’m gonna, uh, just yell
at her or hammer her. And the first thing that I do is just say, “Are you ok?
What’s going on? What emotions are going on right now? I just listened to her
for a half an hour crying kind of work through all that stuff. And I think that
foundationally was really helpful for a trust perspective of our relationship. First
and foremost, I care about you. What’s going on? How are you doing right now?
What are you thinking through? What’s going through your head? And just
listening to her and meeting her where she’s at. And then from that, ok, now tell
me about what happened. Tell me about your perspectives, your thoughts through
all that stuff. And then, ultimately, there were some pretty poor decisions that she
made, and when we got her out of there that night and some of the conversations
that we had, I had to have the more serious side of do you realize like the
seriousness of what you did and how its gonna affect your cadet career and all
those kind of things but it wasn’t from a point of authority like I am your
authority, it was you own your life, you made this decision and you need to live with the consequences, and understand the associated consequences, but I think that our relationship right now as we work through her probation stuff and help her overall is only centered on who she is as a person and how is she gonna learn to grow through the experience? How is she gonna be a better person, a better leader, someday a better wife, a better mom, like, overall, how is she gonna use this to get better?

The AOC recounting this story demonstrated that he valued ensuring a psychologically safe relationship for the cadet where the cadet felt valued and cared for even in the midst of severe consequences for her mistake. Interestingly, the AOC demonstrated humility as he admits that he had to be reminded by his spouse of the importance of this mindset toward helping the cadet develop instead of reacting out of being offended and angry.

Clearly, creating a psychologically safe context for one’s cadets to learn and grow was thought to be critical for being an effective leader developer by AOCs across experience levels. During his follow-on interview after leaving command, one AOC summed up what he would tell incoming AOCs as such:

It's going to be challenging. And also regardless of how much you prepare, it’s going to challenge you in ways you never thought that you would be challenged.

It's going to be messy and to quote a great legendary AOC... "It's going to be messy,” but that's the goodness of it. Care about your cadets. Standards are important but care about your cadets.

Finally, the concept of being present was key, both physically, which they acknowledge is very difficult in the time constrained context of the Air Force Academy,
but also psychologically. As one AOC articulated, “And I don’t mean physically present, it can mean physically present, but it also means psychologically present…if they are answering that permanent party support us, then we are present even when we are not physically there. Meaning they are taking into consideration that we will support them or help them when they have a situation where they need our assistance.” Thus, the effective leader developer is present in a way that provides a psychologically safe environment for the cadets to develop as leaders of character.

**Themes 5-7: AOC Master’s Program—Preparing Leader Developers**

The remaining three major themes that arose from the study related to how to prepare leader developers to be effective in their role, specifically addressing the AOC Master’s Program. The data supported the themes that the AOC Master’s Program was highly valued by the AOCs in preparing them to be leaders and leader developers. Also, the data revealed that the developmental counseling classes were a vital part of the program to the AOCs, and that small changes to the program would help it be more effective.

**Theme 5—Extremely valuable program.** The AOCs all expressed that the AOC Master’s Program was very valuable in preparing them to be a leader developer. This was done through a personal growth process of self-awareness and understanding as well as growing in how they connect and relate to others. When first asked about the program, one AOC blurted out without hesitation, “It was probably the best year of my AF career!” Another AOC said that “it was a tremendously growth filled year in the Master's Program.” One participant who was finishing his second and final year in command stated that “the biggest thing it [the AOC Master’s Program] did is it made me realize
who I was and why I stayed in the AF…I didn’t’ realize it until the cohort year. I didn’t know why I kept doing what I did until the cohort year. Which is why it was transformational, it was life-changing for who I was and made me a better person.” Yet another AOC said that the reason it was so valuable was that now he had “a little more clearer understanding of some of the other pieces that are all part of [leadership]: the emotional intelligence, the awareness, empathy, how to counsel. All those pieces together, how they all really play. As a leader, I think it's a big development for me from start to end.” Even when discussing the AOC Master’s Program with one participant who was nearing the end of the cohort year and had voiced some areas for improvement, I asked him if there was still value in the program even with these areas of what he called “degradation.” He replied “Yeah. 100 percent.”

The AOCs discussed how the program helped them become better versions of themselves. This began with an increased growth in self-awareness and included becoming better in all aspects of their identity and roles in life, personally and professionally. “Was it awesome, dude, yes it was awesome. I’m a better person for it, I’m a better husband for it, I’m a better human for it, I’m a better counselor for it, I’m a better mentor, guide, and all of those things for it. And I loved the year and I learned a bunch.” This sentiment was very commonly shared among the AOCs.

In addition, a key part of the benefit of the program was articulated to be the “intangibles” or the “subjective” aspects of growth and development that are hard to quantify and measure. One AOC summed up this concept by saying,

I look back at the year and I see those being the biggest things I take away, the subjective part. You know, which in the AF, you can’t measure it, it’s hard to
quantify, and if you can’t quantify it, it’s hard to justify. You know and so how do we justify the course over subjective outcomes? That’s hard, so good luck with that one. [smile and chuckle] But that’s the true value of what I saw in that entire year.

In addition, one AOC said that the program does not provide every specific skill for every specific situation encountered by an AOC. Rather, the Master’s Program provides the “foundation” of knowledge, skills, and abilities to do the hard work of being a leader developer along with the capacity to handle the unexpected along the way. “The cohort year I think prepares you absolutely well. Maybe for 60 to 70 percent of what you're actually going to experience. It gives you a nice foundation but then each of the 40 squadrons takes a different pass.” The AOC paused for a few seconds of reflection and then remarked, “I don't know that it's possible, or maybe even desired, to get to that 80 to 90 percent solution. But I think that 60 percent is a great foundation.” He stressed that the foundation is critical to performing effectively as an AOC, but that the development for that AOC is not over after the cohort year since the AOC program in one sense is a three-year developmental experience including the two years in command. Thus, the participant concluded, “Part of the development process is figuring it out yourself” as AOCs engage in helping their cadets develop as leaders themselves.

This development was noted as being aided by the program’s forcing them to look at things differently in order to expand their vision of things. “So, to encourage the class to... just dive in, just be a part of it, challenge yourself, get outside your comfort zone, force yourself to think through what actually makes up your thoughts on leadership, your thoughts on character. Forcing that function was really helpful.” An AOC wrote in a
paper during the cohort year that “The only way we grow and learn is by challenging one another and ourselves through diverse viewpoints, experiences, and ways of thinking.” Clearly to the AOCs, the master’s program provided an opportunity to be challenged and thus grow in important ways for being a leader developer.

Additionally, nearly every AOC commented on the benefit of building relationships with their fellow cohort members as well as opportunities to connect with others in positions at USAFA. When asked for strengths of the program, one AOC said, “Building relationships with the folks that you are going to work with. Both in the cohort and the amount of time that we saw [others], that we saw the 2nd year AOCs. All of those relationships are hugely important” because they provide “the network of support needed to constantly improve as a leader developer as well as handle the crisis situations that arose with the cadets” while in command of their squadrons.

Time itself was also a common theme listed as a strength of the program, time for reflection and to process the knowledge and experiences they were going through. While the AOCs noted that there might be concern by some with some of the unstructured portions of the program, nearly every AOC agreed that the time afforded for reflection was critical to the program’s success and their development. One AOC said that the strength of the program lay in having “access to a curriculum” along with “freedom, flexibility, time” to reflect on the topics and ideas in a way to grow as a person and a leader. When asked for strengths of the program another AOC also spoke with no hesitation, “Time. It gave me time to take my [xx] year old brain and put it back into an 18-22 year old mindset.” Another AOC who was nearing the end of his cohort year commented on the strength of the program by saying, “I'm different than I was when I
first got here, and I attribute that in large part to the space to be able to be different. So the material is good, the framework within it, but the ability to reflect on it and synthesize it, whether it be within the course material or outside or personal experiences that we may not have otherwise have had time to take advantage of. I think that is the crucial piece this year.” And while some AOCs admitted that the AOC Master’s Program may not be required to still be able to function as an AOC, it definitely helped them be more effective leader developers. As one participant acknowledged, “I would say that the program is valuable, and it should be kept. I think that somebody can show up and do the job without having done the program, but they're going to be more effective having gone through the program.” Consequently, AOCs like this one commented time and again that the master’s program proved valuable to being a more effective leader developer.

Yet, many AOCs that were interviewed expressed that while the program can be very valuable, for it to be so, the person going through it must commit to the process of learning and growing as a person and a leader. Numerous times, AOCs reflected that “you get out what you put in.”

Overall my perspective is the program is pretty good, and really it comes down that you get out of it what you put into it so I got a ton out of the year. But I also was willing to put myself out there and really dig in where I think some people potentially didn’t get as much out of it but it wasn’t because it wasn’t there, it was because they didn’t put as much into it.

Furthermore, when one second year AOC reflected on how one of the classes did not help him as much, he admitted that he did not put in as much effort into it, and he regretted that he did not absorb as much of the material and take advantage of some of the
experiences and opportunities to grow like he could have. “I don't deny the fact that I might... potentially have rejected some good thoughts in that class. Maybe if I stopped and paid attention a little more, gave more time and effort, than maybe it could have helped me.” The AOCs agreed that to get the most out of the program, they had to invest themselves fully in the content and experiences offered, however, when they did this, they felt the master’s program impacted their growth greatly.

Four out of the five AOCs who were interviewed half way through their command and then had a follow-on interview after they had been out of command stated that the program was just as valuable, if not more so, to them a year or two later. One of these AOCs rated the program as a nine and a half, if I had to give a number. The cohort year was definitely a nine and a half. The only reason I wouldn't put it at 10 is a couple of the classes I think were a little off, and people made us, I felt pressure and I felt guilt from permanent party because of the time we had off. It wasn't seen as a good thing, it was a slack year, and I think that was far from the truth.

Only one of the five re-interviewed after they were out of command said they would lower the value (from 6-7 to 4-5 in value), and his reasoning for doing so related to how the structures at USAFA seemed to hinder his ability to really do his job as a leader developer instead of anything about the program being less meaningful. The lower score was a reflection of the stress he felt having to do all of the additional taskers and deal with discipline issues within a system that seemed to have little patience for the messiness of development or value for AOCs to have time to spend with their cadets.
Theme 6—Counseling classes are vital. The interviews and document reviews revealed that the AOCs felt that the counseling classes and experiences were the most valuable in their preparation as leader developers. This was not to say that the other aspects were not valuable. It was very apparent that the leadership theory classes and fieldwork classes had value as well since AOCs from every cohort remarked concerning their value. It was just noted that the counseling aspect was where the AOCs felt they grew the most and used the most since taking command or in anticipation of doing so. This was an interesting finding especially since the AOCs commented that most people who hear of the program wonder why there is a counseling aspect at all or think that the leadership classes would be the most important to the AOCs.

The AOCs discussed how the counseling classes were where they grew the most in “awareness of self and awareness of others,” as one AOC put it. The counseling classes were where they learned to listen to understand and how to actively engage with someone so as to connect more effectively, more authentically with them. To the AOCs, these classes and labs were “when you see people genuinely connect” which gave them a paradigm for how to do so in the future with others. These classes are also where they felt they learned to connect with others and “meet them where they’re at” in order to support them and help them grow. Another AOC said, “I will also add that the counseling aspect classes were very practical and very useful with the issues of what you get. The intended outcome of those classes has a direct result on, direct impact on, what I’m seeing as an AOC.” In one interview, an AOC remarked that the counseling classes’ impact culminated in life-saving skills he was able to put into effect on behalf of his cadets.
And I think UCCS, the program, also helped me deal with things personal issues with cadets, especially asking them if they want to hurt themselves, the first time. I didn’t want to say it in the counseling class, it was hard for me to think that, to even ask that question, but we had practiced it and it was easy for me to do, and later on have a cadet come back and say, “You saved my life.” I’m very thankful for those counseling classes.

Time and again, the AOCs remarked how vital the counseling classes were and their appreciation of what they learned and how they grew personally and thus felt better prepared to help their cadets grow as well.

Nevertheless, there was a common theme of concern that others, especially leadership at USAFA, did not understand or appreciate the importance of the counseling aspect of the program. There was a concern that assumptions were being made without understanding the value the counseling education and experience brought to being an AOC. While discussing what she saw as strengths of the program, one AOC said that [some] say it doesn’t need to be as much counseling. It needs to be more leadership, more our development. I couldn’t disagree more. I think the individual counseling lab where we unpack our own stuff, where we work through that, it builds trust within our group and vulnerability, and it leads to the foundational piece of empathy, connection, relation with fellow AOCs as well as with the cadet you’re going to be interacting with. So to me that is the core of being an effective AOC. For me that’s based on the philosophy that, realistically, if they trust you and they’re willing to communicate with you and open up to you,
then that’s when you’re really gonna help them grow and develop in every aspect of their life.

An AOC who had just finished her command tour when interviewed expressed similar concerns and frustrations that others, including leadership at USAFA, did not understand the importance of, and thus failed to value, the developmental counseling classes in the Master’s Program.

I heard complaints from [our leaders’] perspective, [that] the AOCs aren’t prepared to do what we’re asking them to do. OK, so what are the objectives that we need to come out of the program with? Because there are a lot of [negative] comments made about the counseling, but I don’t think people understand the benefit. They just hear the word counseling and they make a bunch of assumptions about what that means. They would want to see more tactical, practical level in the skills game. Well, that’s all stuff that you can teach through. There are things you really need to chew and sit on that I don’t think people really appreciate.

In addition, another AOC remarked how the counseling part of the program was “the most effective part of the cohort year.” To this AOC, like many others, what most stood out as helpful developmentally to prepare you to be an AOC is the counseling piece. Everyone that comes in to be AOCs are all tactically sound. They're all good officers. They've all been capable in their career for them proving that. But, universally all of us are deficient in core counseling techniques, the idea of empathy. I mean, people have different levels of empathy coming in, but really relationship
development, counseling, asking questions, like being effective in those conversations to get to the point that you can truly be a leader. Because you can model things and you can look at things operationally, but part of leader development or part of character development is in the day to day actions of all of life, and you don't get that in a typical officer relationship.

As the AOCs described, the developmental counseling aspect of the master’s program became for them a critical part of their preparation as leader developers.

AOCs expressed that since others, especially their chain of command, did not understand or appreciate what they learned and the growth they experienced in the counseling classes, they were left “having to defend the counseling stuff.” Yet, those classes and experiences taught them the whole idea of being present with somebody and really caring for them. Again, people take for granted how important that is because we make excuses for time, but that’s where I felt like I found the most success with my cadets. And yeah, you can use texts and you can use email, but if you don’t have moments where you're one-on-one or even just like I said earlier, a smaller group, you lose opportunities…

Similarly, an AOC discussed how being a leader developer was “more of a counseling role,” yet “that is the one skill set that no one has sufficiently coming into the cohort year” and yet that is the role “that all need to be effective as to be a truly effective leader developer.” Furthermore, the AOCs acknowledged that the counseling skills they learned were geared toward development rather than being clinical counselors. A cohort member
explained the value to him of the counseling classes in preparing him for his role as a leader developer by saying,

I think the AOC program has probably come a long way, and it continues to grow, which is great. It continues to give AOCs the tools they need to help develop cadets and interact with the cadets. I can tell you, if I was coming here right from my last job as far as counseling goes, I would fail miserably. I wouldn't feel comfortable having conversations with cadets that I know I will have with them without the type of training and courses we took throughout this year.

As with all the themes, there was a great deal of agreement among the AOCs on how counseling was helpful to them in preparing them for their roles as leader developers.

However, one place where the data showed some variance was in the codes that described how the counseling classes in the program helped them grow in their Emotional intelligence, their ability to show or be comfortable with emotions, and their ability to connect with others (Figure 11). Interestingly, while both male and female AOCs described these areas of improvement within themselves, there was distinct split of occurrence in these codes between the genders. All three of these categories were split with two thirds of the occurrences appearing in male participant data and a third remaining for the females after the data was normalized for sample demographic distribution. While time and conditions of this study did not allow for further exploration as to the reasons for this split, one likely possibility lies not in the actual growth difference in these areas for the participants of different genders. Rather, the split was in perceived growth in these areas and thus could be caused from socialized gender strengths and weaknesses. In general, many men in western society may not have been
taught to be comfortable with emotion or the associated emotional intelligence required to connect on more deeply relational levels than their women counterparts. Thus, when these male participants underwent the counseling classes and experiences of the AOC Master’s Program, they found themselves growing significantly in these areas. Experiencing this substantial learning and growth in new and possibly surprising ways made them more likely to mention this development as part of the perceived strength of the program. Whereas, while the female AOCs still grew in these areas, they were not as unexpected or as unknown as their male cohort members, and therefore, the female participants did not report these areas as much as the men.

**Figure 11.** Frequency of code occurrence for emotional and relational growth

Finally, observing the AOCs interact with their cadets demonstrated that what they were reporting concerning their growth in connecting with others was indeed a reality. Watching one AOC interact with cadets even during an interruption in an interview showed an advanced emotional intelligence and relational ability through the non-verbals, tone of voice, and sensitivity to tend to the individual’s needs. Even though it was only a few minutes, the encounter confirmed the self-reports of the AOCs. In looking back on his AOC experience a year after relinquishing command, one participant
explained that “the foundational part that I used every day, still use, was the stuff that sticks out at the top of my head, now that it's three plus years removed, is the counseling classes.” Like this AOC, the other participants described and demonstrated through their behaviors that they highly valued the things they learned in the program’s developmental counseling classes.

**Theme 7—Small changes needed.** While the program was described as being very valuable in preparing them to be leader developers, the AOCs agreed that some small changes would improve the program. However, in acknowledging the need for some changes to take place to enhance effectiveness, the AOCs also expressed frustration of too much of the program “changing on the fly.” An AOC spoke to this frustration by saying, “It’s not good to be making stuff up on the go.” Another remarked that “the best analogy I've had for this was, you don't build the aircraft while you're flying it. You build the aircraft first. You set the groundwork, and then you fly it.” Changes were identified but within the context that they need to be purposeful and executed well.

However, as one AOC described, “it’s hard to change one variable because it would potentially change everything.” In other words, care must be taken when making changes since changing one thing may inadvertently negatively affect other aspects of the program. Therefore, the program needs a means to systematically study AOC effectiveness and thus the program’s effectiveness in preparing AOCs as leader developers. Then and only then, should changes be made for improvement and to fix what one AOC called the “missed opportunities.” Likewise, a cohort member expressed, “I think our program needs more stability. It's frustrating as hell.” Similarly, describing
her concern that decisions be made from proper assessment as well as the need for
stability in the program, a graduated AOC remarked

    I feel like we change it too much every year that we don’t really know what has
truly worked. Just because 10 AOCs griped about something, maybe it is good
that they’re complaining because it had an effect, it created some kind of, it
caused them to think about something. So are we changing things based of the
need to change them or are we changing them because UCCS says hey we’ve got
a change to the curriculum we want to do, but have we ever really let it stabilize
to take some good data to say what really is working…like I mentioned at the
beginning, if we change one class, do we know how it shifts the results overall?
Or do we not care? It's a larger endeavor.

The result of this constant change of the program and in the classes clearly had a negative
impact on the AOCs in the cohort. Multiple observations of classroom dynamics
revealed the frustration of the AOCs toward the instructors and the courses. In one class,
the team of instructors expressed that they were still trying to finalize the best way for the
major assignments to be accomplished and delivered even though it was already half way
through the semester. Some AOCs expressed concern and frustration, while some just
simply stopped looking up from their computers for the remainder of the lesson. In an
interview, one cohort member described the overarching problem of mismanaged
expectations as,

    We don't know what they want. That really frustrated people in the program. I
think some people that were all in kinda checked out, over holidays. Screw it.
This semester is gonna be about me. I'm gonna give it fifty percent, pass. But I'm
not gonna probably learn as much as I could have. Cause they've just checked out.

And you probably see that when you observe. I don't know. I'm sure you see
there's people in the back row just working on papers. Working at it verses
listening to the conversation and talking. They're like, "Screw it. I'm checked out.
Nobody is listening to me, all this change is frustrating." I know we gotta have
change, but we've changed three times in one semester or something.

Many AOCs expressed this need for stability in the program so that changes are done
intentionally and not “on the fly.”

It was remarked by many that while there was value in them, the leadership
classes needed improvement, especially in regard to bridging the gap between theory and
practice, between the ideal and the realistic when it comes to doing the job of developing
leaders. Discussing this concern, one AOC mentioned that there needs to be “a mix in
there somewhere as far as realistic expectation management” and the ideal state that they
are working towards.

In addition, many of the AOCs were concerned that the program seemed to lack
clear expectations and a clear plan to meet those, as well as these being subject to change
on short notice. One AOC mentioned the need to establish clear expectations, “up front,
expectations set, then you can always go back to those expectations, and I think that can
always be defined more and I think that probably would have helped some.” The lack of
clear expectations for AOCs, both while in the program and in command, proved to be a
source of widespread frustration.

Furthermore, interviews revealed that recruitment and selection is critical in the
success of a leader developer, i.e. those coming to be AOCs should already have a desire
and passion to develop others as leaders. If they lack this intrinsic drive to engage in the messiness of development, they will not be as effective, or likely detrimental. All of the AOCs interviewed shared a common theme as a reason for coming to be an AOC: to “give back” and invest in the development of others. They emphasized the need for AOCs who have a passion for developing leaders, even at their own expense, not just simply getting a job done or a task accomplished. “I think finding the right AOC is crucial, somebody that wants to be here. I mean you would have some people that want a diversity, I get it, diversity of thought. But I think that somebody that wants to be here, I think that makes for a better AOC and a better developed leader in the end.” Another AOC stated that she came with some of this “stuff” already a part of her but that the program helped refine it by giving “intentionality and purpose to what was already there.” In essence, there seems to be something to getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats, as Collins (2001) would say. Thus, start with raw material of leader developer who will then engage with the program to get the maximum out of it. Thus, it is recommended that the Air Force ensure it is recruiting officers to be AOCs who already have a disposition toward being a leader developer (as described in the first theme).

Similarly, getting the right teachers teaching the right courses is just as important. AOCs described how having a good teacher could overcome a lot of issues with the content, but also that a good course might “fall flat” and fail to make the desired impact in the student’s learning if the teacher was perceived as lacking connection with the material and/or with the students. On the topic of instructors, one AOC said,
I think a lot of that goes to the discussion about relationship with instructors. Relationship with instructors. So, like [instructor], I think the courseware for his course, I had almost zero interest in the theory behind it, however, his class was super impactful because I think of his ability to instruct and the discussions that came out of the course, top notch. And it’s clear his experience and everything that he brings, that’s invaluable.

While the AOCs made it clear that the program must have good instructors who can connect the material with the students, an interesting variance showed up in the data concerning specific classes. The prevalence of the codes relating to the teaching course showed that something changed drastically between three different cohorts of AOCs (Figure 12). The first-year cohort had 100 percent of the prevalence of the code that said the college teaching course had little value to them, while 100 percent of the prevalence of the code that said the college teaching course was good belonged in the AOCs still in the most recent cohort. Additionally, a vast majority (75 percent) of the prevalence of the code for the need of a good teaching course was found in the AOCs interviewed at the end of their second year of command. Similar to earlier occurrences of variance in the data, time and conditions did not permit a deeper exploration into why this was so, however, discussions revealed changes in the program over the last few years. The AOCs interviewed in their second year for this study did not have a college teaching course when they went through the cohort year, and thus, they were expressing the need for such a course. The AOCs that were interviewed during their first year in command had a teaching course, but it seems it was not as refined or taught as well. Then, the AOCs interviewed in their cohort year had a more refined syllabus and a teacher that
seemed to connect well with the students and help them learn and develop more as teachers of college aged young adults. This finding suggests that improvements are being made and should be made to the courses and that teacher effectiveness is also important to the success of the program.

Figure 12. Frequency of code occurrence for college teaching course

Another recommendation is to ensure the focus of the AOC Master’s Program remains, not merely on specific skills, but on building capacity in the officers to be leader developers. This begins with their growing in self-awareness and ability to connect and help others grow. An AOC pointed out,

The opportunities to be in an academic environment for a year for me to figure out who I was, and who I wanted to be, was exactly the platform I needed to get rid of all this scar tissue of 12 years of doing the job, and focus on myself because you can’t lead anybody if you don’t know who you want to be as a leader. So that opportunity, whether it’s the curriculum, or the time, or both of those things I think synergistically that made, that was the platform for me to be a lot more confident and comfortable with who I am and who I want to be.

Along with this, it is important to have time to reflect on the new knowledge and experiences the program provides. The AOCs emphasized the importance of down time
to do this, i.e. down time is not wasted time. Therefore, the program should not grow to fill up the “dead space,” or there is a risk of losing this growth.

Another recommendation is for the leadership of the program to provide a clearer set of expectations for the AOC Masters year as well as the subsequent two years as an AOC. This can be done by better integrating the counseling and leadership aspects of the program both in the curriculum and in the administration between UCCS and USAFA.

One AOC reflected back on his cohort year, saying,

In my mind, I think that there’s this like dichotomy I feel like, that there’s like you have this counseling aspect at UCCS and you have this leadership thing at USAFA, and it just kinda gets, they never marry. They just kinda butt heads. And I feel like, I think if you could start off the program, with it intertwined, I think there’s some potential for more of a, just a congruent degree, I would call it.

Also, while AOCs understood there needs to be some “nebulous” aspects of the program, there should be some increased sensemaking along the way reinforcing the intentionality of the process that might not be fully apparent to the AOCs.

To assist in this integration of the different aspects of the program, many AOCs asked for a framework to guide their synthesis of the different ideas, skills, and experiences to which the cohort is exposed. The framework needs to address how to develop leaders of character. As one cohort member put it,

There's not a class in this program that talks about developing leaders of character specifically. It's all leadership, and team leadership, and organizational leadership. Whenever I drive through the front gate, is it we develop organizational leaders or
is that we develop leaders of character? So why don't we talk about that ever?

Nobody talks about that.

Finally, numerous AOCs stated that there needs to be continuing intentional development of AOCs past the AOC Master’s Program year and into the two years in command. They emphasized that some form of an intentional plan to continue developing them as they develop their cadets was needed. During both his initial interview as a first year AOC and his follow up interview at the end of his command, one AOC reiterated the need for continuing development for the AOCs.

I would say that the AOC Master’s Degree Program, as proposed I think during its inception, was supposed to be a three year developmental experience. It was supposed to be a continuum of development, and it's not that. I think we all know that. It's a one-year master’s degree program with two years in the seat. And not to say we are not being developed during our two years as AOCs, but the institution is not creating or putting on that development.

Furthermore, an AOC who was still working at USAFA but no longer in command summarized that the AOC Master’s Program is good, though it can be improved in some ways, but that to radically alter or remove it would be to the detriment of USAFA and its mission of developing leaders of character.

I would like the end result of this conversation to be that I think it’s meeting the expectations, it’s preparing AOCs very well in its current structure, it can always be tweaked and improved, and so I’m happy to be a part of the process, but I think the cohort year is invaluable. If there’s ever talk of that going away and going
back to the old system of not having that, I think we would be doing the Air Force a disservice as far as cadet preparation and leaders being developed. The AOC Master’s Program still had significant value to the AOCs while still needing small improvements to enhance its effectiveness in preparing leader developers for USAFA.

**Research Question 1: What it Means to be an Effective Leader Developer**

Hogan and Kaiser (2005) stated that “who we are determines how we lead” (p. 175). These authors recognized that one’s identity as a leader plays a foundational role in how one behaves as a leader. Accordingly, when examining how one can be effective in helping someone else develop as a leader, it seemed appropriate to first begin by examining what it means to embrace not merely the identity of a leader, but rather the identity of a leader developer. Out of this identity of a leader developer flow dispositions and behaviors that make one effective for this important role in an individual’s and organization’s leadership development.

Hogan and Kaiser (2005) proposed their maxim cited above from a personality perspective. However, this dissertation finding and answer to the first research question provides a modified version of their assertion by suggesting that the disposition toward developing others as leaders is critical in being an effective leader developer. For the sake of this study, similar to the description by Zacarro (2007), dispositions includes both attitude and mentality of the leader. Similarly, as Melton, Mallory, and Green (2011) describe, these “dispositions guide behaviors” (p. 58). However, the focus of this study was the disposition toward what it means to develop someone else as a leader and not merely focus on being the leader oneself. This study found that the effective leader
developers began with a desire to be a leader developer, not simply a leader. This desire centered on making others better and being about their followers’ development as leaders rather than simply getting them to perform certain tasks.

While the disposition toward developing others as leaders forms the foundation of an effective leader developer, the capacity to provide sensemaking for cadets to understand their experiences in light of their own development as leaders, model what it means to be a leader of character, and provide a psychologically safe context in which to grow as a leader of character serve as key ingredients to being effective as a leader developer. To illustrate what this effective leader developer looks like, I offer the following vignette.

**Example of an Effective Leader Developer: Major Luckett**

Major Luckett is a very tall man with fair features and wise but kind eyes that suggest a depth of life experience including both pain and joy. He wears a flight suit fitted with patches matching his assignment to the Commandant of Cadets at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). On the right side of his chest he wears the seal of USAFA and on his left is a name tag. His name tag has both his Air Force pilot wings above his name and the Air Force commander’s pin proudly displayed on the left of his name. This pin is given only to those select officers who have been entrusted as commanders of a squadron or higher unit within the Air Force, representing both legal and moral authority and responsibility. Rounding out his patches, an American flag is fastened to his left shoulder, and his right shoulder bears the patch of the cadet squadron that he commands as AOC.
It is fitting that Major Luckett is in his flight suit, since he has just returned from flying at the airfield where he is an instructor pilot in the T-53 (a single engine propeller trainer designed to give cadets exposure to powered flight before heading off to aviation training as an officer after commissioning). In fact, Major Luckett’s primary job in the Air Force throughout his 14-year career has been as a pilot in multiple large, crew-based aircraft. He has been stationed both within the United States and also abroad as well as experienced multiple deployments in combat zones in the Middle East. He has thousands of hours of flight time and flown all over the world, conducting peacetime and combat operations.

On the home front, Major Luckett is married with one toddler daughter of whom he talks fondly. A sparkle seems to glint in his eye as the edges of his mouth turn up into an endearing smile as he discusses his daughter and what she is doing lately.

Especially when it comes to discussing things concerning his role as a leader developer, Major Luckett’s speech is slow and deliberate. Yet, his speech is not slow in the sense that he might be nervous or unsure of what to say, but rather sending a message that he cares deeply about the subject matter upon which he is conversing. In fact, by speaking in this manner, he leaves the listener with a feeling of confidence: confidence that what he says he means and that what he shares is truly important.

What Major Luckett shares resonates as powerful to me the researcher, one who has sat in the same “chair,” as it were, fulfilling the role of a leader developer as an AOC. In fact, I literally feel goosebumps emerge on my arms as he outlines what he thinks a leader developer should be and do. Without even seeing my conceptual framework, this AOC describes the essence of what is found time and again in the other interviews, yet he
summs up so well (i.e. the concepts of sensemaking, modeling, and psychological safety along with a disposition toward development of others as leaders). He explains that vital to being a leader developer is:

Opening their eyes up to that perspective on life, knowing that there is a stimulus-choice-response cycle that we live in or that we grow through or that we develop in as human beings [sensemaking], but the other side of it that I think is even more profound is that I try to demonstrate that in how I interact with them and how I serve them [modeling]. So, what greater way can I show them how to be a leader, influence them rather on how to be a leader than by demonstrating it for them. What good is it if I tell them, “You guys need to demonstrate compassion for your troops,” but every time they come into my office or have an interaction with me, I’m hugely abrasive and offend them and influence them to not to want to come into my office [psychological safety]. If I am not demonstrating what I am asking them to do, then I’m not doing my job as a leader developer. So, the leader developer thing, what does it mean to me? It’s that stimulus-response and the choice in between the gap, and it’s also demonstrating the type of behaviors and traits that I want them to exhibit in their own lives. To be fair some of the best moments of this job are when they get it [disposition of a leader developer].

The goosebumps returned one week later while sitting in his office as Major Luckett facilitated a meeting with his cadets in the highest cadet chain of command positions for their squadron. He made a point to let the cadets drive the meeting, intently listening and taking notes. At times Major Luckett would politely interject and ask a thought-provoking question, to which the cadets seemed appreciative even if they did not
know how to cope with it. Major Luckett would at times give advice or offer to help when they seemed stuck, even making a phone call on speaker to discuss the issue with a civilian staff member who could assist them, modeling the very skills he was describing to them. At one point in the meeting he made a point to explain how the task they were fulfilling had a near term and necessary benefit for the objectives of their squadron’s operations, but then he went on to describe how what they were doing fit into the larger picture of leadership and their development as leaders. It was visibly apparent by the look on the cadets’ faces that they understood the concept, even going on to verbally say that they appreciated how he had made that connection for them. I am afraid that I could not hide the smile that crept over my face in seeing in action the very concepts Maj Luckett had discussed with me just one week earlier. Truly, this was an authentic leader developer who lived out the principles that not only he felt were critical, but what both theory and the other participants in this case study proved to be vital in developing leaders. As he said about the cadets, he himself clearly “got it.”

**Research Questions 2 and 3: How to Develop Leader Developers**

All of the AOCs interviewed found the AOC Master’s Program to be very valuable in preparing them to be leader developers. Based on the data, the program seemed to do so by providing the knowledge, experience, and reflection time to grow personally and interpersonally, not merely in accumulated skills (although the counseling skills were remarked as practically helpful as well), but in a deepening capacity from which to draw on in helping others develop and grow. That was the real value iterated time and again by the AOCs. One participant summed this idea up saying, “That growth and connection and understanding, see and be seen, that takes part in the counseling labs
is second to none in a developmental, human developmental perspective, whether your
gonna lead, be a husband, father, housewife, whatever it is, that was fantastic.” It seemed
that the developmental counseling classes provided the context for much of this growth
but the leadership theory classes were also helpful, though perhaps not as much. As
another AOC stated, “it’s all just in the back of our mind, knowing who I am, coming
into every conversation.” For the AOCs, the master’s program provided the means to
grow as a person, a leader, and a leader developer.

There was an agreement that the program should remain relatively stable but with
some changes to a few classes to make them more effective. For example, many AOCs
mentioned the coaching class had good content, but the instructor needed to be better at
teaching and connecting the material with the role of an AOC. Also, the college
teaching class was suggested to benefit from changing the content and focus to more
directly apply to how AOCs will be instructing their cadets. Since AOCs consistently
mentioned that they do not have enough time to engage with their cadets because of the
schedule and administrative tasks, many recommended including some USAFA-specific
administrative skill training before taking command. However, almost all of those that
mentioned this quickly remarked that they did not think it wise to do so at the expense of
the time and space for reflection and growth that the year provides. As for experiencing
that growth, multiple AOCs echoed the importance of owning their own development in
the program similar to what they desire from the cadets. As one put it, “You get out what
you put in. Really it comes down that you get out of it what you put into it.” The
program provided the AOCs the opportunity to grow tremendously depending on their
investment in it.
Lastly, one AOC summed up why both counseling and leadership are important in the program to prepare for being a leader developer:

And I will tell you the most meaningful conversations I’ve had in my entire career, and arguably in my entire life, have come after a year of getting a master’s degree in counseling and leadership. Leadership to know who I am, counseling to know how to listen. So I never know what’s going to walk through the door, but the version of me that would have received Cadet Snuffy with his family issue, or Cadet Snuffy with his Air Force Academy issue, the version, a year and a half ago, would have been much more judgmental, much less compassionate, empathetic, and probably not able to help them as much. So, I always define this year as my listening degree because at the end of the day, the decrease of judgement and the increase in listening skills makes you a much better person to be in the room with.

AOCs felt that the AOC Master’s Program and its mix of developmental counseling with leadership classes effectively developed them to be leader developers, though they also expressed opportunities for improvement and growth of the program.

**Summary of Findings**

This qualitative case study of AOCs at USAFA provided the context to research and understand more about what makes an effective leader developer and how to prepare someone for such a role. Specifically, a deeper understanding into this topic was gained by studying AOCs that were in various experience levels at USAFA via the means of interviews, observations, and document reviews. The data collected revealed seven major themes concerning how to be effective as a leader developer and how to develop
leader developers. The findings first of all showed that those in this role need to embrace a disposition of a leader developer that focuses on the development of others, embraces the difficulty of the job because of its intrinsic rewards, and possess a humble and teachable attitude toward growing as a leader and helping others in that pursuit. In addition, the findings indicated that effective leader developers engage in sensemaking for their people, model what it means to be and grow as a leader of character, and provide a psychologically safe context in which to learn and develop.

The remaining findings demonstrated that USAFA’s AOC Master’s Program was highly valued by the AOCs in preparing them for their roles as leader developers. Secondly, the developmental counseling classes within the program proved to be vital in the AOCs preparation. Finally, the study demonstrated that there remained ways to improve the program, however, these changes should be small, deliberate, and based on research.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 5, I analyze and synthesize the findings that answer the research questions within the context of the study’s conceptual framework. In doing so, a model for leader developer effectiveness and preparation is updated and proposed. Furthermore, this chapter discusses implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and future research concerning leader developers in general, and Air Officers Commanding (AOCs) at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) specifically.

Discussion

This study addressed three research questions: (a) from the perspective of AOCs at USAFA, what dispositions, behaviors, and skills make for an effective leader developer?; (b) how do AOCs at USAFA perceive the AOC Master’s Program in preparing leader developers?; (c) according to AOCs at USAFA, how should the program evolve to best equip AOCs to be leader developers? In essence, these research questions can be summed up as asking, What makes someone effective as a leader developer and how do we best prepare that person for such a role? Specifically, this study examined these questions within the context of the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) and its Air Officers Commanding (AOCs) who are the primary leader developers of USAFA cadets. The study design and rationale from Figure 5 is again shown here for clarity:
Figure 5. Study rationale and design.
Since USAFA has its framework defining what a leader of character is and how to develop someone for this role (CCLD, 2011—represented in the “Leader of Character Framework” box), this qualitative case study sought to understand how an AOC, (“Leader Developer” box) is effective as the key facilitator in the growth of cadets as leaders of character, and also how AOCs are prepared to act as leader developers (“Developing Leader Developers” block).

As seen in Chapter 4, the findings of this study answered the research questions and thus provide the conclusions to the study design and rationale diagram’s question marks (Figure 13). The dotted lines in this diagram show how the findings from this qualitative case study of AOCs at USAFA illuminated the answers to the general research questions and were mostly consistent with, but also expanded on, the conceptual framework of a leader developer at USAFA as depicted previously in Figure 5.
Figure 13. Study design with findings
This study demonstrated that an effective leader developer is one who has the disposition for developing others as leaders, engages in sensemaking, acts as a model, and provides psychological safety for growth to occur. In addition, the program to develop AOCs as effective leader developers (the AOC Master’s Program) is seen by participants as extremely valuable in its current form, of which the counseling training and experiences are a vital part of the leadership development education. However, despite the overwhelming value that the AOC Master’s Program provided in preparing leader developers, the study illuminated that the program can be improved with some relatively small changes. The following sections will clarify what these answers mean in relation to effective leader developers and their preparation at USAFA.

The Effective Leader Developer

Examining the first research question more closely reveals that the effective leader developer has certain abilities and behaviors consistent with the initial conceptual framework held forth in Chapter 2 of this dissertation that includes sensemaking, modeling, and providing psychological safety for their developing leaders (Figure 5). However, while my hypothesis proved accurate concerning these three aspects of being a leader developer, what also arose as important in the findings was that leader developers must first possess a disposition focused on helping their followers develop as leaders rather than simply leading themselves (Figure 14). Looking back on the research, this finding was not altogether surprising, but was nonetheless not anticipated to arise as prominently as it did amongst the AOCs. Yet, the data show that all four of these aspects are critical for leader developers to be effective in their role of developing others as leaders of character. While the LCF demonstrates the process of helping develop others
as leaders of character (CCLD, 2011), these attributes of a leader developer are foundational to facilitate that process—essentially they demonstrate the “How” (attributes of a leader developer) of the “How” (process of LCF) of developing leaders of character. In other words, while the LCF outlines the process of developing leaders of character, the leader developer framework focuses on the person acting as the key facilitator in that process of developing others as leaders.

Figure 14. The effective leader developer.

**Disposition of a leader developer.** The study revealed the importance of AOCs to adopt the proper disposition as leader developers beyond simply being leaders. As the LCF points out, the development of leaders of character is an ongoing process (CCLD, 2011) and as such the key facilitator in helping others on this process must identify with the role of leader developer. This study found that not only must effective leader developers possess and exhibit abilities and behaviors, but they also must have the proper
attitude and mentality suited for the role—one that focuses on the development of others. As one AOC put it, “It’s wholly my responsibility as an AOC to help them develop, to learn and grow.” The need for this specialized disposition results because a leader developer role includes more than simply being a leader. This is because the mission of USAFA is different from a more traditional organization. A traditional unit uses development of its people as a “means” to achieve its “ends” of accomplishing tasks for the organization’s mission or objectives. For USAFA, however, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1, the desired “ends” are the cadets’ development as leaders of character while the experiences that cadets must go through at the Academy (i.e. the “tasks”) are the “means” to accomplish these “ends.” Figure 2 is presented here again for clarification of this crucial difference.

![Mission of USAFA](image)

*Figure 2. Mission of USAFA as different from traditional organizations.*
Because of the unique mission focused entirely on developing the cadets as leaders of character, the findings in this study indicate that the AOCs must be something different as well. The disposition required to effectively fulfil their role included recognizing this unique role within the context of a unique mission focus of USAFA. As one AOC described, “At the Academy, we’re building a foundation for these young airman to lead our airman and so they are our mission. This is the only opportunity, the only time, where our mission is our people.” In other words, while these officers are commanders with G-series orders that gives them the same legal authority and responsibility as all other commanders in the Air Force, yet they carry a unique title from all other commanders in the Air Force—that of Air Officer Commanding (AOC). The findings of this study suggest that it is fitting that they have a different title since they are indeed commanders, yet they are more than regular commanders, they are AOCs. Just as they are indeed leaders, they are more than regular leaders, they are leader developers. With these titles comes a shift in focus from simply influencing their people to accomplish a mission or objective, the AOCs instead now focus on using the tasks and experiences to accomplish the growth of their people as leaders. Thus, as Figure 15 shows, these officers are more than commanders, they are AOCs; they are more than leaders, they are leader developers.
As seen in the data and expressed in the first finding, this role is challenging, though rewarding since it involves having to be humble and teachable (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Schein & Schein, 2018) as they execute their duties as leader developers. Rather than being able to “take the reigns” and “run the show,” the AOCs must allow the cadets to develop their leadership skills through the process of the LCF (CCLD, 2011) which inevitably involves the messiness expressed in the fourth finding related to psychological safety. The need for a leader developer to embody humility reflects similar findings from Owens and Hekman (2016) which pointed to humility’s spread amongst an organization when modeled by the leader. This collective humility then generates growth and performance amongst the team. While Owens and Hekman’s (2016) findings focused on leaders and followers within a traditional performance-based context, the present study demonstrated how much more humility and teachability are required for leader developers. Engaging in this way requires AOCs to change their mindset and focus on development over performance metrics, a challenging task for accomplished and highly successful field grade officers. Yet, according to the AOCs, those who adopted
this disposition as a leader developer were the ones who proved most effective as AOCs. Conversely, those that did not do so, while at times viewed positively from leadership up the chain of command, were seen by the participants as the most ineffective in developing their cadets as leaders. Thus, leader developers must adopt the identity as such in order to be effective in their unique role of developing others as leaders.

Similarly, the AOCs fulfil a special role within USAFA akin to the Air Force’s Weapons Officers (officers chosen to attend specialized advanced training in employing weapons systems to advance the mission). Figure 16 shows how AOCs also function similarly with regards to the mission of developing cadets as leaders of character—they receive special advanced education and training (AOC Master’s Program), are employed at the tactical level (cadet squadrons), and remain key advisors to the chain of command (CoC).

![USAFA Weapons Officers](image)

*Figure 16. AOCs as USAFA’s weapons officers.*

Because of this unique role and training, it would be wise for USAFA to listen closely to AOCs’ input regarding how best to develop cadets as leaders of character. Thus, the
findings generated from this study prove all the more significant for USAFA, but also other organizations with a focus on developing leaders.

**Sensemaking.** The study found that leader developers must engage in sensemaking with those they are seeking to help develop as leaders. The AOCs discussed and demonstrated that a leader developer must have the ability to help their followers make sense or meaning of their experiences in light of their development as leaders of character. As Weick (1995) pointed out, identity is foundational in sensemaking, and so the AOCs expressed that to be effective they must help the cadets see themselves as growing as a leader of character. An AOC described this phenomenon by saying that “if they [the cadets] get to that answer themselves and lead it themselves, you have gotten them to be those who develop others in leading themselves.” Weick (1995) emphasized that how a person sees herself influences how she then sees her environment and also how she interprets her experiences. Day and Sin (2011) found that “how one thinks of oneself as a leader” significantly impacts that person’s development as a leader (p. 556). Similarly in the current study, by helping their cadets see themselves not merely as college students trying to survive a difficult ordeal but rather as individuals who are developing as leaders of character, the AOCs help their cadets to make sense of their experiences not merely as the tasks or objectives in themselves, but as means to growing in their own character and leadership. Just as Ligon, Hunter, and Mumford (2008) demonstrated that good leaders rely on past experiences for their sensemaking efforts, so this study showed that leader developers proved critical in helping cadets in their sensemaking as leaders. In this manner, AOCs formed a foundational role in the cadets’ abilities to do so since they acted as the key integrators of the experiences at
USAFA for each cadet in their squadron. Consequently, the study found that leader developers are more effective when they possess the ability to engage in intentional conversations using guiding questions and illustrations. As one AOC explained, “Any one of those potential avenues for conversation can be an opportunity for leadership development.” This manner of Socratic dialogue, as is used in CBT (Clark & Egan, 2015), helped the cadets understand their experiences as a means to grow as leaders of character. These conversations may occur in formal and informal settings, and effective leader developers take advantage of them every chance they arise.

**Modeling.** According to the findings, leader developers must not only help their people through discussions and teaching, but they must also model for them what a leader of character looks like. This study found that leader developers, as CCLD members often assert, need to “show them what right looks like.” To do so, the AOCs not only model the outward appearance of officers of character, but they needed to demonstrate what such leaders do in all aspects of life, professionally and personally. As one AOC said, “If I am not demonstrating what I am asking them to do then I’m not doing my job as a leader developer.” This finding supports previous studies concerning the importance of modeling in leader development. For example, Martin et al. (2015) found that along with competence and care for followers, role-modeling by a leader proved critical for leader development. Likewise, Bass and Avolio (1990) described the importance of a leader modeling desired behaviors in transformational leadership’s concept of idealized influence. In addition, Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang (2005) discuss how positive behavioral role modeling in authentic leadership stimulates personal growth and self-development of followers. Thus, a leader developer must model the elements of a leader...
of character—namely, one who lives honorably, lifts others, and elevates performance (CCLD, 2011). In addition, the study revealed that AOCs must also model what it looks like to grow as a leader by being humble and teachable as they, too, develop themselves along the process of the LCF.

Psychological safety. The final finding of effective leader developers in this study revealed that they must be able to create a psychologically safe context for their cadets to grow as leaders of character. As the exemplar quote in Chapter 4 shows, “development is messy” and AOCs felt that effective leader developers are “willing to be in that mess with somebody else, knowing that it’s not a specific script, but it’s a process that’s potentially different for everybody and who’s willing to be there and listen and help through that journey.” This context included both the dyadic relationship of AOC to cadet as well as the environment of the cadet squadron, helping create a culture and climate within the organization conducive to development as leaders. Bradley, Klotz, Postlethwaite, Hamdani, and Brown (2011) demonstrated that psychological safety increases team performance during task conflict. Similarly, the current study revealed that psychological safety also increases leadership development by providing the environment in which the cadets could be challenged and supported while practicing leadership themselves. Furthermore, psychological safety in the developmental context examined in this study meant that the developing leaders must feel cared for even when they are pushed and disciplined. Yet, this study also found that psychological safety created by the AOCs should not then be used to increase unethical or unwanted behaviors. Pearsall and Ellis (2011) warned of this danger in their study which found that teams with utilitarian orientations that also operated with increased sense of
psychological safety tended to exhibit an increase in unethical behaviors. One of their recommendations to guard against any negative consequences of psychological safety was that managers serve as social models for their followers. In like manner, the care exhibited by the AOCs did not mean that the cadets were free from consequences for their mistakes and failures. On the contrary, caring for the cadets meant that they were held accountable and taught to hold each other accountable as an act of “tough love” toward each other since, as an AOC put it, “standards are important.” In doing so, the AOCs created a context in which cadets would be challenged and supported as described in the Center for Creative Leadership’s Coaching Framework (Ting & Scisco, 2006). Engaging in this manner provides the means to help cadets grow as leaders through the “messiness” of development. Owens & Hekman (2012) demonstrated that humble leaders who engage in the “messy process of learning and growing” are the ones who catalyze development (p. 801). The leader developers who created this psychological safety amongst their followers allowed them to practice being leaders, just as the LCF describes (CCLD, 2011), and to learn from their failures. Furthermore, in order to create such a safe context for growth, the leader developer must create a relationship of trust with those they are seeking to develop, and this included having and displaying empathy and truly listening to understand them in order to “meet them where they’re at” before helping them move forward and grow.

**Developing Effective Leader Developers**

The final two research questions dealt with understanding how to develop leader developers. Specifically, the data revealed that the AOC Master’s Program was very valuable in developing AOCs as leader developers, that education and training in
developmental counseling areas proved vital as part of the overall leadership development program, and that some changes were recommended to improve the program while avoiding any drastic alterations (see Figure 17).

![Figure 17. Developing leader developers.](image)

**Highly valuable program.** The study revealed that the AOC Master’s Program was effective in developing leader developers and highly valued by the participants as reflected especially in their interviews. The main reasons the program was perceived as valuable was that it provided the foundation of knowledge, skills, and abilities to do the hard work of being a leader developer along with the capacity to handle the unexpected along the way rather than providing every specific skill or checklist for every situation encountered by an AOC. Day and Sin (2011) demonstrated the inherent challenge in developing leaders since much of that development can take place in less-observable levels and in different ways and rates with each individual. Thus, the need exists for programs that prepare leader developers to engage in this challenging context and process
of helping leaders develop. The concept of capacity to function effectively as a leader developer reflects a similar concept in the Air Force. Every flying training sortie gradesheet includes a graded item titled “Airmanship.” This item exists to recognize that the pilot must demonstrate the capacity to handle both expected and unexpected situations with the needed wisdom and skill to safely accomplish the objectives of the mission. The item does not relate to any specific skills or knowledge, but rather is the “catch all” area that emphasizes that a pilot must be able to handle whatever may arise during a flight. Similarly, the AOCs valued the master’s program because it seemed to provide such a foundation and capacity to handle the various situations they inevitably faced with their cadets.

Also, the program was valuable in preparing the AOCs for their roles as leader developers by providing the context, education, and experiences that facilitated personal growth through self-awareness as a person and as a leader. By doing so, the AOCs were more equipped to help their cadets on their journeys of development. Avolio and Hannah (2008) discuss the importance of adaptive self-reflection in leader development. This type of reflection includes being open and teachable, the very characteristics emphasized in the AOC Master’s Program. One AOC stated, “The only way we grow and learn is by challenging one another and ourselves through diverse viewpoints, experiences, and ways of thinking.” In addition, by being a cohort program in which the AOCs went through each class together for the entire year together (with the exception of one elective), they were able to develop strong and enduring relationships that helped them both professionally and personally when facing the challenges of being an AOC. Finally, the AOC Master’s Program not only afforded the necessary education and experiences
needed to develop as leader developers, it also provided time and space to do the hard work of reflection and growth that occurred for the AOCs outside of the formal classes and training.

**Counseling vital with leadership.** The developmental counseling aspects of the program proved extremely vital to the preparation of the AOCs for their roles as leader developers. One AOC described how the counseling aspect of the program helped him when he stated that “understanding myself and also being able to understand others and meet them where they’re at was the best part of the program.” Counseling classes provided the greatest opportunity to grow the most in “awareness of self and awareness of others,” as one AOC put it. The counseling classes were where they learned to listen to understand and connect more effectively with others in order to support them and help them grow. The AOCs remarked that what they learned and how they developed in the counseling classes were so important because they were used daily with the cadets and were also the very elements that the officers typically had not developed in their careers so far. Yet, as critical as the developmental counseling classes are in preparing AOCs, the study revealed that to the AOCs’ frustration, others at USAFA seemed not to value this aspect of the program. This proved especially true for other leaders who valued task behaviors over relationship behaviors. Numerous studies demonstrate task and relationship behaviors are complementary (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006). Bottomley, Burgess, and Fox (2014) described the need for leaders to be developers who build trust, connect with others, and inspire growth. The developmental counseling education that exists within the AOC Master’s
Program helped AOCs become aware of, and grow in, the complimentary nature of key leader behaviors that are essential to creating an effective developmental context.

Can be improved with small changes. The study found that while the AOC Master’s Program proved valuable for the AOCs in their preparation as leader developers, there is room for improvement. Similar to Reimer, Taggart, and Chapman’s (2019) assertion that leadership development efforts must be systematically planned and executed, the AOCs expressed that the changes need to be intentional, incremental, and well-executed while maintaining a sense of stability that seems to have been lacking in recent years. Participants expressed concern of unintended consequences of overly reactive and big changes. Finishing her final year in command, one AOC summed this need up well when she remarked,

I feel like we change it too much every year that we don’t’ really know what has truly worked. Just because 10 AOCs griped about something, maybe it is good that they're complaining because it had an effect, it created some kind of, it caused them to think about something. So are we changing things based of the need to change them or are we changing them because UCCS says hey we’ve got a change to the curriculum we want to do, but have we ever really let it stabilize to take some good data to say what really is working…like I mentioned at the beginning, if we change one class, do we know how it shifts the results overall? Or do we not care? It's a larger endeavor.

In order to oversee these changes, the leadership of the program needs to be formalized to ensure the integration of all aspects of the program at USAFA and UCCS while providing clear expectations that are shared by faculty and staff administering the program as well
as the rest of USAFA, especially leadership. Along with this integration, the program needs to be adjusted to include continued development of the AOCs beyond simply the master’s degree cohort and into the following two years in command. Also, as with all education, teachers matter, so the program must ensure that the instructors are both knowledgeable in the field of study and competent in their ability to connect it with the students for their learning and growth. In addition, the data revealed a need to ensure that courses make a clear link between theory and practice. In particular, the leadership classes must do so especially with regards to leadership development and how to help others develop as leaders of character. As one cohort member put it, “There's not a class in this program that talks about developing leaders of character specifically.” Finally, the selection process for AOCs must be adjusted and made more robust in order to ensure that the officers chosen for the program are ones who will be teachable, with a proclivity toward helping others develop, and who possess or will adopt the disposition of leader developers.

**Implications and Recommendations**

This qualitative case study of AOCs at USAFA shed light on what makes an effective leader developer and how best to develop leader developers. The findings helped shape the conceptual framework surrounding these concepts by revealing that a leader developer must possess a certain mentality and employ certain methods to be effective in that role. The mentality requires a person identify as a leader developer, not merely a leader, and thus has a disposition toward developing others as leaders, embracing the challenge of the messiness of development, while being humble and teachable. Subsequently, the methods needed to be effective as a leader developer are to
engage in sensemaking with one’s subordinates, model the desired attitudes and behaviors, and provide a psychologically safe context both interpersonally and organizationally that is conducive to developing leaders.

Additionally, in order to develop AOCs as these kind of leader developers at USAFA, the findings of the study suggest that the AOC Master’s Program is valuable especially with its inclusion of developmental counseling classes but that some changes can be made to improve its effectiveness. The following sections outline suggested implications for policy and practice at USAFA as well as recommendations for future research. However, it is important to note that while these findings have implications for policy and practice at USAFA, other service academies and other organizations engaged in leadership development may well benefit from their transferability and applicability as well.

**Implications for Policy**

Though a decade and a half has passed since the AOC Master’s Program was formalized by the Agenda for Change (DODIG, 2004) as a required program for selection and preparation of AOCs at USAFA, this study revealed that it remains an effective program in developing AOCs for their roles as leader developers. While sexual violence response and prevention remains a critical aspect of the program’s preparation of AOCs, the AOC Master’s Program provides so much more. The study demonstrated that the program remains relevant and valuable to the mission of developing officers of character at the United States Air Force Academy by preparing AOCs for their complex and critical role as the key facilitators of their cadets’ growth. Since the counseling aspects of the program have proven so valuable to AOCs in their roles as leader developers, Air Force
policy should continue the requirement for the AOC Master’s Program to be an accredited master’s degree in counseling and related fields at an institution in Colorado Springs (DODIG, 2004). As such, it seems wise to continue the current degree program and relationship with the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. Doing so provides the needed accredited counseling education and degree while also allowing for USAFA-taught leadership classes and additional exposure to cadets that are vital for AOCs’ preparation. Thus, the standing Air Force level policy from the Agenda for Change should remain in effect.

In addition, USAFA policy could stand to benefit from the findings in this study as well. In particular, since the study revealed that the AOC Master’s Program needs better oversight and integration, a restructure of where the program is “housed” and who administers the program within USAFA as an institution is likely in order. Interestingly, USAFA already is in the process of doing this restructuring. For example, as this dissertation is being written, USAFA has enacted a change to the oversight of the program by moving it under the Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD) and placing three personnel assigned to execute the program from USAFA across three organizations—CCLD, the Department of Behavioral Science and Leadership, and the Commandant of Cadets. Doing so demonstrates the priority of the program and its needed integration across all elements at USAFA.

Implications for policy exist beyond USAFA as well. Since the service academies have similar missions of developing leaders of character for our armed forces, each institution should continue the policy of sending their primary leader developers through similar education and training programs (as demonstrated was the case 20 years
ago in Appendix D). In addition, since there is significant overlap in mission, though slightly different contexts based on the different armed services, the academies should institute policy requiring more collaboration and shared ideas relating to how best to evolve their programs for preparing their leader developers. Such exchange of ideas would only improve the effectiveness of their shared efforts to develop effective leader developers.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings in this study revealed many implications for practice regarding how AOCs can be effective as leader developers for their cadets and how the AOC Master’s Program may be improved to better develop the AOCs for this role. This section will focus on practical recommendations based on the themes found in the study.

First of all, the four elements of an effective leader developer should be understood not only by AOCs in the cohort and in command, but also by the rest of USAFA staff and faculty. Doing so will not only help the AOCs conceptualize how they interact with cadets but also will help build a shared mental model of how a leader developer is effective across all of USAFA. The effort to share these concepts should start with the senior leadership and then move into the lower positions. Consequently, a common conceptualization of what an AOC must be and do will be created while also helping all staff and faculty embrace their roles as leader developers. This action will help with integration amongst the mission elements at USAFA and enhance the overall mission of developing the cadets as leaders of character.

Likewise, not only is it important to properly communicate to leaders and others at USAFA what an AOC is and does as a leader developer, but how the master’s program
prepares AOCs must be communicated as well. This study found that most in leadership positions (and others for that matter) at USAFA do not understand what the master’s program includes. Because of this situation, the program is either at best not understood or valued as it should be, or at worst, it is devalued and treated with skepticism. The situation that arises from this lack of understanding produces a systematic problem for the AOCs and hinders their ability to effectively function as leader developers, in turn degrading the entire mission. Instead, I recommend that those involved in the AOC Master’s Program find ways to explain what the program is about to others at USAFA, beginning with those in the AOCs’ chain of command. Not only will this help integrate efforts, but it will also help establish the AOC as USAFA’s weapons officers who should be consulted and respected for their insights into how best to accomplish the mission of developing cadets as leaders of character (see Figure 16).

Next, selection of AOCs needs to be improved. The process needs to include some way of understanding if the officer is inclined at least somewhat toward the disposition of a leader developer rather than simply wanting to lead. This insight could be gained through something as simple as a one-page paper describing why the officer wants to be an AOC and how they plan to use the master’s degree year to learn and grow for that role. Another suggestion is to have members from the AOC Program oversight team involved in reading and scoring these papers and also accompanying the Commandant to the selection panel. These recommendations will help ensure that those officers who are selected to be AOCs have the motivation to learn to be leader developers and consequently will more likely engage in learning and growing as such and being more effective when in command.
Additionally, the program for developing AOCs should shift from emphasizing only the first year, or the master’s degree program, to all three years of their AOC experience, thus including their two years in command. Doing so will ensure the AOCs continue to develop as leader developers and also better equip them for their follow-on assignments as leaders elsewhere in the Air Force. Also, the emphasis on a three-year AOC Program will help with integrating what is learned in the master’s degree with the experiences in execution. To do so, I recommend incorporating 360-degree feedback tools (Edwards & Ewen, 1996) to help the AOCs understand how they are viewed by others in the organization. These tools incorporate feedback from their followers, peers, and leaders. In addition to these tools, I recommend utilizing leadership coaching such as is available through the Center for Creative Leadership (Ting & Scisco, 2012) as well as ongoing seminars and opportunities to attend conferences and activities relating to leadership and development. Additionally, I recommend decreasing emphasis on a “Status of Discipline” briefing that focuses on how AOCs punish their cadets as a measure of their effectiveness, to a “Status of Leadership Development” where AOCs share how they are living out the elements of effective leader developers while engaging in the process of the Leader of Character Framework (LCF). In an effort to avoid the pitfall of hoping for one thing while rewarding another (Kerr, 1978), shifting such an emphasis would help reconcile what the AOCs are taught as important for them to be with what the institution and leadership values.

Another important implication from the study is that the AOC master’s degree program should remain a cohort program at UCCS because of the invaluable depth of relationships that are formed and the personal and interpersonal growth that is afforded in
such a program. By going through the year together in a developmental counseling and leadership program, AOCs are made to counsel one another, and in the process, they learn not only to be authentic with others, but also to build bonds of trust that otherwise would not exist. These bonds have been shown to be critical to the AOCs while in command as they constantly have to lean on each other for help through the demanding and difficult situations that arise with cadets. According to the data, the experience of the cohort year and the subsequent relationships formed are so crucial that to break up the cohort would be clearly detrimental to AOCs when they assume command.

As a sixth suggestion, not only should the AOCs be selected based on their aptitude to develop as leader developers, but the instructors in the master’s program should be chosen deliberately as well. Since the findings demonstrated that teachers matter in how well AOCs learn from their courses, the instructors for the program must be both knowledgeable in the subject matter and also skilled in connecting the content with the students in a way that effectively facilitates their learning and growing. The master’s program is an educational degree program that requires the learning and demonstrating of new knowledge, but it is also meant to be a transformative experience where the students are forced to interact with, and respond to, the new knowledge in ways that produce growth personally and as leader developers. The right teachers who are skilled and experienced in doing so are needed for this task. Waters-Bailey (2016) found that transformational leadership by teachers leads to increased student motivation in learning within a higher-education setting. Similarly, the instructors teaching in the AOC Master’s Program should exhibit these transformational characteristics as well. In order to ensure the instructors are so prepared, program leaders can select them based on
personal experience having worked with and observed them as well as interviews to reveal their understanding of the material and their commitment to transformational leadership within the classroom. In addition, leaders of the master’s program should also ensure that instructors are trained in the LCF as well as the leader developer conceptual framework so that they are best equipped to help AOCs engage with the material of their course within these frameworks.

Finally, the study’s findings revealed a need to integrate and synthesize the concepts taught throughout the master’s program. To help accomplish this integration and synthesis of the program’s content and experiences, the program should formally adopt the LCF as the foundational model for developing cadets as leaders of character and also include the leader developer framework of this study. Accordingly, every instructor in the program needs to not only be aware of the LCF and leader developer framework but also have a deep enough knowledge of them to be able to interact with students on how what they are learning fits within these constructs. In so doing, the AOCs will better be able to synthesize what they are learning into their personal leadership philosophy, leadership development philosophy, and organizational leadership development philosophy. In order to accomplish such integration, all instructors in the program must not only read the LCF (CCLD, 2011), but should also attend an orientation seminar that walks them through interacting with the concepts of the LCF.

The findings from this study should be presented, particularly the leader developer framework, and discussed. In addition, to aid in the integration of the courses’ concepts as a whole, the program itself should be adjusted, but only slightly. I recommend keeping the current courses as they are now (but with expert teachers that
also connect with the LCF) with one simple change in emphasis within the courses. The core leadership courses are designed to build upon each other. The first is “Characteristics of an Effective Leader” followed by “Leader and Leadership Development” and ending with “Teams and Organizational Leadership.” The outline below demonstrates how these could be adjusted in emphasis around the LCF and their culminating projects to support the needed integration and synthesis of concepts within the master’s program:

**AOC Master’s Program Design Overview**

- Design the Program around USAFA’s Leader of Character Framework
  - Provides the scaffolding by which they can:
    - Understand USAFA’s mission of developing leaders of character
      - What it truly means to do this
      - How it is different from operational bases/organizations
      - What the end state of their cadets should look like
    - Understand and transition into their new role as leader developers
      - How being a leader developer connects with but is more than just being a leader
      - How not just going to be a commander, but more than a commander as an Air Officer Commanding (the reason there is a special name for it)
    - Understand and synthesize leadership, counseling, teaching theories/research
      - Primarily see this in the 3 core classroom leadership classes (as synthesizers of the rest of the curriculum)
      - However, all professors in the program must understand the Framework and have at least a working idea of how what they are teaching aligns within it (and encourage students to use it in discussions/papers/projects/activities/etc.)

**Summer:**
- AOCC 5010 Theories/techniques of Developmental Counseling
- AOCC 5020 Laboratory in Developmental Counseling
- AOCC 5290 College Student Development
- LEAD 5700 Intro to Research and Statistics
- AOCC 5210 Characteristics of an Effective Leader
  - Focus on the Leader of Character framework portion
Lives Honorably
- Lifts Others
- Elevates Performance

- Examine other leadership theories/models/research
  - How fit or complement this framework?
  - How fits for you?
    - What resonates with you?
    - What do you want to grow in?
- Culminates in a personal leadership philosophy/model that uses theory/research learned as foundation while connecting with the Leader of Character Framework

[There are many ways to do this and will show up differently for everyone and will not stifle personal choice or creativity but rather give structure around which that innovation can flourish—individuality within the context of USAFA’s mission/intent and guiding paradigm]

**Fall:**
- AOCC 5100 Group Dynamics and Group Leadership (counseling)
- AOCC 6500 College Teaching & Learning
- AOCC 5750 Mental Health Triage & First Aid
- AOCC 5430 Career Development

**AOCC 5250 Leader and Leadership Development**
- Focus on the “Developing” part of the framework
  - Own
  - Engage
  - Practice
- Examine leader and leadership development theories/models/research
  - How fit or complement the framework?
  - How you might implement/use?
  - Focus is on the dyadic relationship of leader-leader (team/organizational focus will be there but that focus is the following semester)
  - Character development

**Spring:**
- AOCC 5800 Organization & Administration of the AOC Program
- AOCC 5600 Leading Diversity
- AOCC 5160 AOC Field Experience

**AOCC 5280 Team and Organizational Leadership**
- Focus on how to bring the Framework to bear with teams and organizations
  - Examine team/org leadership research/theories/models
    - How fit?
    - How use?
    - Specifically, how set up a Sq within context of USAFA to effectively develop leaders of character
- Practicum:
  - KEY: It is a SYNTHESIS Project of the whole year
- Built upon what has been learned/developed over the year
- Create one’s own Model for developing leaders of character within their squadron at USAFA
- Personal leadership Model → Leader Development Model → Squadron Leadership Development Model
  - Must show how they feed/connect/build upon each other
  - Must use research to justify ideas, not just experience
- Apply this model to their squadron
  - Concrete ideas for structures/engagements/processes/methods of interacting within and without the Sq
  - Can also include for this part examples of current AOCs with cadets (good and bad)
    - Why did it work for them? And why might it work for me?

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Day et al. (2014) demonstrate that “understanding leadership development goes far beyond merely choosing a particular leadership theory and training people in behaviors related to that theory,” but that it is rather “a complex topic that is deserving of scholarly attention with regard to theory and research independent of what has been studied more generally in the field of leadership” (p. 64). In other words, leadership development entails more than simply telling a person to copy certain behaviors. Therefore, Day et al. (2014) explain that the field is still “relatively immature” and “replete with opportunities for researchers and theorists” (p. 80). The present study adds important insight into the field of leadership development by revealing insights into what makes an effective leader developer and how to prepare someone for that role.

Specifically, effective leader developers begin with the proper disposition toward developing others, engage in sensemaking, modeling, and providing psychological safety for those being developed as leaders. In addition, to prepare for this role, preparation programs such as the AOC Master’s Program provide valuable education and training.
through the mix of developmental counseling and leadership classes though some improvement areas exist in its current form.

However, to better understand the concept of what makes a leader developer effective and how to prepare someone for this unique role, more research should be conducted utilizing 360-degree feedback studies (Day et al., 2014; Edwards & Ewen, 1996) aimed at gathering data from leaders above the leader developers, others who work with them, and especially those being developed. Since developing others as leaders is inherently interpersonal, these 360-degree feedback tools yield insights into how a leader is viewed across an organization. In particular, in regard to AOCs at USAFA, this would entail gathering qualitative data via interviews and open-ended surveys concerning how to best engage as a leader developer, i.e. attitudes, behaviors, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that make one effective or ineffective in this role. In other words, these instruments may reveal more clearly from multiple perspectives how leader developers best engage with others to influence the development of leaders of character, giving a richer understanding of this unique role. These data can be retrieved from Group AOCs (direct supervisors of the squadron AOCs), Vice Commandant, Commandant, as well as the enlisted men and women who work for AOCs (Academy Military Trainers or AMTs), other staff and faculty, and most importantly, the cadets being developed by the AOCs. In addition, though development as a leader can be difficult to measure and sometimes the impact does not show up for years to come (Day, 2011), some form of quantitative data would be helpful in seeing the impacts that leader developers had on their people. One example of such data may be found in examining how transformational leadership behaviors of AOCs impact the organizational citizenship behaviors of their cadets found
in the Squadron Organizational Climate Critique (SOCC) archives at USAFA and examining such results within the framework of a leader developer. For the AOC Master’s Program, a feedback instrument should be developed that could be used at different time periods through the AOCs’ careers where they can explain what was helpful, unhelpful, and what more is needed based on their experience as leader developers. Doing so would assist in gathering more data useful in determining how effective the program is preparing AOCs and how to adjust it for greater impact. This could take the form of surveys similar to faculty-course questionnaires (FCQs) already available at UCCS, though some modifications toward the unique role of an AOC may be in order. Consequently, another means of gathering this kind of quantitative and qualitative data would be to conduct an AOC Job Analysis such as the one recently created at USAFA by Reimer (2019) using Bartram’s (2005) Great Eight leadership behaviors (see Appendix E). By utilizing these types of instruments based on validated research concerning leaders, a greater understanding of leader developers and their preparation programs can begin to take shape.

Likewise, in preparing individuals to be leader developers, more work can be done in other organizations that focus on leadership development. For example, studying executive coaching companies whose primary mission is the development of leaders may reveal a richer understanding of the larger topic since they share similar roles but in different contexts. One such organization that may benefit is the Center for Creative Leadership whose multiple targeted interventions are used around the globe in various contexts. In addition, Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) instructors fulfil similar roles as leader developers with the cadets at their units. Studying another
group such as this would help reveal similarities and contrasts amongst these leader
developer populations contributing to a deeper understanding of this critical role. In
addition, other service academies, ROTC units, higher education leadership programs,
and corporate leadership development organizations provide important and relevant
contexts in which the role of a leader developer should be studied. Doing so will reveal
greater insights into this vital, yet little studied, role in leader and leadership
development.

Conclusion

This study introduced and explored the concept of a leader developer, something
the greater body of leader and leadership development literature lacks. Specifically, this
research utilized a qualitative case study to examine the questions of what makes an
effective leader developer and how best to develop leader developers? The study
provided richer detail and insight into how best to develop leader developers and why
certain leader developers may better impact the development of leaders than others. A
conceptual framework of a leader developer was utilized and refined producing the
themes of a proper leader developer disposition, sensemaking, modeling, and
psychological safety. These four aspects stood out as key factors in the effectiveness of a
leader developer. In addition, findings affirmed that the AOC Master’s Program was
highly valued by the AOCs in preparing them to be leader developers, and highlighted
strengths such as the counseling classes with their personal growth and ability to connect
with others. It also suggested some minor areas for improvement such as improved
administration of the program, shift toward a three-year development program, ensuring
the right AOCs and teachers are selected, and ensuring the theory is linked to practice
within the context of the Leader of Character Framework (CCLD, 2011). Such data may then be useful in tailoring the AOC development program as well as the staff and faculty development programs at large for their roles as leader developers at USAFA. In addition, for the larger body of leadership development organizations, this research suggests that possibly emphasizing similar attitudes and behaviors related to developmental disposition, sensemaking, modeling, and psychological safety in their leader developers may assist in the overall development of their employees and clients. Also, designing their training programs to reflect those elements of the AOC Master’s Program that were highlighted in this study may enhance the effectiveness of their leader developers and subsequently their own leadership development objectives. Thus, findings from this study can benefit those engaged in leadership development programs across business, education, government, and other sectors.
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Waters-Bailey, S. L. (2016). Perceived transformational teacher leadership and students' motivation, academic performance, and intent to persist in STEM education at a community college Retrieved from http://uccs.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwpV09T8MwED1BWRBlgADxUdBJDCwt1EmchlmBNspSCYmysFsuHUFmIGgs_FiAfAikLkhZEkeRLdsv57t37wB872Y0_IUJKhShkFpnmjnF6phLHSpPBhk6h0f4yfUsSTdM4deRCSo1x012jZAndainJa37LYtaj7jIH71fV6ojRfFWV1RjE7YYyXVRm_XIGrO78wPKXJ5FzAn_FTfe39QufzVJHuQ1b1qqydIWXY17WE4796vg87404o_gA2swvqvh52IBUKHpWLKrOptJ_xtSE_o8gVFPu4ZnGNb02ptAEKR7vHVZuYMCjff32K3KBZUlnHf519gk-zyRSzmmuCwqBAwumC-UlXpjCK6SyewhHdajnbuNUMzbfrHsCulz-bMrtPnQAyvbDnHyLV5C3sSU0L7uvYYqgKuOZB5p9Cf90nz9Y3n8O2NW-cw6QPPfPxmV1AjybtslwWPwaP0qk


Appendix A

Interview Protocol

• Introduction:
  o Who I am: Hans Larsen, PhD student at UCCS in LRP program, former AOC
  o What I’m doing: interviewing current AOCs about the AOC masters program to understand what you think about it in so far as it is supposed to prepare you for being a “leader developer” (i.e. One who’s primary mission is developing other leaders) in order to also better understand the concept of “leader developer”
  o Discuss/Sign Consent Form

• What brought you to be an AOC?

• What does being a leader developer mean to you?
  o What does that look like in general?
    ▪ How have you seen this specifically before you came to this position and since?
    What was an experience that demonstrated this?
  o At USAFA with cadets?
    ▪ What was an experience with a cadet in your role as a leader developer and how did you use your knowledge or experiences from the master’s program to inform your intervention/response?
  o How has your view of being a leader developer changed or developed after your experiences as an AOC, in the program and/or in command?

• How did the AOC masters program prepare you to be a leader developer?
  o What specific concepts, skills, and/or experiences best shaped you for this role? And can you give an example of this showing up with cadets?

• What aspects of the AOC masters program least prepared you to be a leader developer?

• How do you think the AOC masters program could be improved to better prepare leader developers?
Second Interview/Follow-on questions:

- {Focus on asking the participant to elaborate on ideas already discussed and/or seen in observations and documents, especially with examples}
- Would you explain how you acted as a leader developer in your observations and what you believe was effective or not in those circumstances?
- How did things you learned or experienced in the AOC masters program impact these (or other) instances?
Appendix C

Observation Protocol

- Admin:
  - Time and Place of observation:
  - Activity:
  - Overall sense:

- AOC Interactions
  - How address cadets? (language, tone, purpose, body language, etc.)
  - How discuss cadets with others? Positive? Negative? Focus of thoughts?

- Initial Themes
  - How interactions informed by themes in their interview/documents? (record those themes here:
    ____________________________________________________________________________
  - Any actions/words relating to sensemaking?
  - Any actions/words relating to role modeling?
  - Any actions/words relating to providing a context of psychological safety?
  - Other significant ideas/themes?
Appendix D

Document Review Protocol

- Admin:
  - Date of paper:
  - Title of paper and purpose (include which class):
  - Overall sense:

- Ideas about leadership development in general

- Ideas about being a leader developer (behaviors, attitudes, philosophy, etc.)

- Any ideas relating to sensemaking?

- Any ideas relating to role modeling?

- Any ideas relating to providing a context of psychological safety?

- Other significant ideas/themes?
Appendix E

Original AOC Master’s Pilot Program Documents

ENHANCING USAFA AIR OFFICERS COMMANDING (AOCs) READINESS

A PROPOSAL FOR A PRE-AOC MASTER’S DEGREE IN COUNSELING AND LEADERSHIP

BGen Steve Lorenz, Commandant
Col Dave Wagie, Vice Dean & 34TRW Permanent Professor

PURPOSE

- Request approval for USAFA to develop and test a one-year full-time education program to prepare Air Officers Commanding
  - Program results in Master of Science Degree in Counseling and Leadership
  - Officers serve as AOCs for 2 years after completing the Masters Program
USAFA Requirements

- Due to background of today’s cadets, and mission of 21st century AF, AOCs need counseling and unit development skills
- AOC job description includes
  - Commander, disciplinarian, trainer, role model
  - Counselor, leader developer, unit climate-setter
- However, few AOCs have all these skills, or experience supervising this age group

Programs at Other Academies

- West Point--programs since 1988
  - Current program: one-year MS in Education
    - 16 courses, taught at USMA by West Point faculty & Long Island University (LIU), LIU grants degree
    - Coordinator: USMA Dept of Beh Sci & Leadership
  - TAC officers take this program, in addition to previous experience as platoon & company CCs
- USNA--started in 1997 with 11 officers
  - MS in Leadership Education & Development, taught by Naval Postgraduate School at USNA
    - 12 months, 54 quarter units, with thesis
    - Coordinator: USNA Dept of Leadership & Law
USAF Academy Proposal

- MA in Counseling & Leadership Develop.
- Through Univ Colorado-Co Springs (UCCS)
  - Total 15 courses; UCCS teaches 11 on UCCS campus, Academy teaches 4 at USAFA
  - UCCS grants degree; already has accredited program in being--little change needed
  - AOC students are in AFIT student status, assigned to USAFA for admin, advising

USAF Academy Proposal

- Timeline
  - AOC-students arrive 1 June to in-process
  - Start classes 1 July, finish all but one by following 1 July
    - Spring courses allow AOC-students to teach leadership theory to cadets and do assessment of their new squadrons
    - 1 course left for fall as AOC--capstone seminar
  - UCCS calendar allows students time for leave, orientation, BCT duty
Proposal--Advantages

- AOCs get degree tailored to job, with no
  PCS or extension (3-year tour, AOCs for 2
  years)
- Can test-run program for minimal cost
  - Use USAFA AFIT slots in test phase
  - Start 10 students summer 98, 10 in summer 99
  - If proves out, increase to 15 in 2000, and a
    full 20 in 2001

Proposal--Costs

- Short term
  - In-house teaching load 1998 & 1999
  - Office space, computer support for 10 students
  - AFIT slots--out of current USAFA total
- Long term
  - 3 additional manpower slots to teach the
    Academy grad-level courses, advise students,
    and coordinate program with UCCS
  - AFIT slots for 20 AOC-students, (includes
    tuition @ $3500 per year per student)
  - Office space, computer support
RECOMMENDATIONS

- CSAF/CORONA approve concept, allow USAFA to conduct 2-year test
  - 10 students in 1998, 10 in 1999
- USAFA report on program assessment to fall 99 CORONA for go/no-go decision
The Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership in conjunction with The University of Colorado-Colorado Springs (UCCS) offers a Master of Arts in Counseling and Human Services Counseling and Leadership Track Option

Program Goal, Assumptions and Objectives

Goal

The broad goal of this degree program would be to:

"Educate and prepare future Air Officers Commanding for their especially complex role in developing and inspiring cadets as future Air Force officers."

Assumptions

• Most officers assume AOC duties with limited to no real experience in supervising and with little knowledge and understanding of the college-age population.
• AOC duties commonly require some expertise in individual and organizational/group development processes, as well as skills in individual and group counseling.
• The AOC role is complex involving the need to be an administrator, organizational climate influence, counselor, developer of the individual (both personally and professionally), disciplinarian, teacher, as well as the obvious commander.
• Little to no education/training is currently provided to new AOCs in the above areas; AOCs would benefit and cadet development enriched if AOCs had formal academic education in counseling and leadership development.

Objectives

Initial objectives for this program have been identified as follows:

• Provide participants an understanding of human development issues, especially focusing on the college-age population.
• Provide a foundation of knowledge in research, assessment and consultation such that AOCs can be more informed consumers of information relating to individual and organizational development as well as socio-cultural issues.
• Provide skills development in the areas of interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, individual and organizational counseling, and educational instructional methods/techniques.
• Provide practical application opportunities relevant to AOC roles and responsibilities.
• Provide a master’s degree opportunity for participants that will be useful not only in their role as an AOC, but throughout their Air Force careers.

Lt Col Dasinger/DFBLC/333-2107/17 Feb 98 United States Air Force Academy
Organizational Structure

United States Air Force Academy

Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership
Graduate Studies Program in Counseling and Leadership
Program Coordinator: Lt Col Hank Dasinger

Graduate Committee

Chair: Col David B. Porter

Graduate Committee Members and Advisors:
BEH SCI 501  Research, Assessment and Consultation - Lt Col John Micalizzi
Independent Study/Field Project: Major Jeff Jackson
BEH SCI 502  Educational Psychology - Col Dave Porter/Lt Col Tony Aretz
BEH SCI 503  Leadership Instructional Practicum - Major Gregg Tanoff
BEH SCI 504  Leadership Development Capstone Seminar - Col Dave Porter
MAS 505    The Military Profession - Lt Col Jerry Martin/Major Kurt Schake

Graduate Advisors:  Col Chuck Yoos
Dr. Dean Wilson
Lt Col Ritu Campbell

Key Functions

34 TRG Program Manager: Lt Col Sheila Borchelt
Registrar: Dr. Dean Wilson, DFR
Outcomes Assessment Coordinator: Lt Col Tony Aretz
Squadron: Lt Col Hawk, DFSS
Personnel: Major Terri Wilcox, DP
Computer Applications/Technology Consultant: Mr. Larry Bryant
Research Assistant: Ms. Laura Neal

Program E-mail (under “Lists”): AOCMasters@DFBLCUSAFA

1  Committee members generally will serve as course developers, course directors, instructors (if listed with a course) and advisors/mentors to a student(s) for the program and field project.
Graduation Requirements

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Summer 1</th>
<th>Fall 1</th>
<th>Spring</th>
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<tr>
<td>BEH SCI 501</td>
<td>BEH SCI 502</td>
<td>BEH SCI 503</td>
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<tr>
<td>COUN 506</td>
<td>COUN 501</td>
<td>COUN 510</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAS 505</td>
<td>COUN 502</td>
<td>COUN 511</td>
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<tr>
<td>COUN 515</td>
<td>COUN 533</td>
<td>COUN 543</td>
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<td></td>
<td>COUN 504</td>
<td>COUN 586</td>
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<td>12 semester hours</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summer 2</th>
<th>Fall 2</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tr>
<td>COUN 513</td>
<td>BEH SCI 504</td>
<td>Independent Field Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 semester hours</td>
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Total Hours
Required:
48 Semester Hours

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<td>Research, Assessment and Consultation</td>
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<td>501</td>
<td>Educational Psychology</td>
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<td>Leadership Instructional Practicum</td>
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<td>504</td>
<td>Capstone Seminar in Counseling and Leadership</td>
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<td>MAS</td>
<td>The Military Profession</td>
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<td>505</td>
<td>Individual Therapy</td>
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<td>501</td>
<td>Individual Therapy Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>502</td>
<td>Human Growth and Development</td>
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<td>504</td>
<td>The College Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>506</td>
<td>Group Therapy</td>
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<td>Group Therapy Lab</td>
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<tr>
<td>513</td>
<td>Systems Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>515</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>533</td>
<td>Issues, Ethics, and Trends in Professional Counseling</td>
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<td>543</td>
<td>Career Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>586</td>
<td>Social and Cultural Foundations for Professional Counselors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 total courses (not including the independent field study)

2 Current as of 23 Feb 98
Proposed Program Sequencing

**In-processing/Orientation**

1-15 June
- Administrative In-processing (OPR: DFSS)
- Academic Program Overview/Orientation (OPR: DFBL)
- 34 TRW Orientation (OPR: 34 TRG)
- Leave as schedule permits

*Commander’s Course: Deferred until Spring 99 (OPR: DP)*

**Summer Session 1**

- 12, 13, 14/26, 27, 28 June
- 7 Aug (project presentation)
- 6 July through 7 August
- 6 July through 7 Aug OR
- 13 July through 7 Aug
- 3 - 21 August

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<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEH SCI 501</td>
<td>Research, Assessment and Consultation (includes on-going independent field study)</td>
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<td>COUN 506</td>
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<td>MAS 505</td>
<td>The Military Profession</td>
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12 credit hours

**Fall Session 1**

24 Aug - 19 Dec

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<tr>
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<td>COUN 502</td>
<td>Individual Therapy Lab</td>
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<tr>
<td>COUN 533</td>
<td>Issues, Ethics and Trends in Professional Counseling</td>
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<td>COUN 504</td>
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<td>BEH SCI 502</td>
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15 credit hours

1 The COUN 506 class start will vary depending on UCCS instructor availability.
### Spring Session (1999)

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<td>BEH SCI 503  Leadership Instructional Practicum</td>
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<td>18 Jan - 17 May</td>
<td>COUN 510  Group Therapy</td>
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<td>COUN 511  Group Therapy Lab</td>
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<td></td>
<td>COUN 543  Career Development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COUN 586  Social and Cultural Foundations for Professional Counselors</td>
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<td>15 credit hours</td>
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23 - 29 March Spring Break

### Summer Session 2

<table>
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<th>Dates</th>
<th>Courses</th>
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<tr>
<td>June/July 99</td>
<td>AOC School</td>
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<td>BCT Responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 June - 5 Aug</td>
<td>COUN 513  Systems Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Tues and Thurs, 1630-1905 hrs)</td>
<td>3 credit hours</td>
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</table>

### Fall Session 2

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<th>Dates</th>
<th>Courses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Aug thru Nov/early Dec (40 contact hours req'd) Meeting times TBD</td>
<td>BEH SCI 504  Counseling and Leadership Capstone</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3 credit hours  Seminar</td>
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</table>

Total program credit hours: 48 credit hours

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*Note that there is considerable overlap between the June AOC School, the COUN 513 class, and the AOC BCT responsibilities. The COUN class offering is not flexible as other UCCS students will also be in this class. Thus the AOC school and BCT schedules will need to account for the Tues/Thurs UCCS schedule as indicated.*
Appendix F

AOC Job Analysis

BULLET BACKGROUND PAPER
ON THE
AIR OFFICER COMMANDING JOB ANALYSIS

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) job analysis is to develop a USAFA-level theory of human behavior for the AOC role. Accurate and reliable evidence is required to inform a broad-level evaluation of AOC job design (e.g., job description, recruiting efforts, selection processes, education and training programs, and overall performance expectations). Job design serves to define and measure USAFA’s performance expectations of AOCs.

JOB ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The AOC job analysis embraces a multi-phase approach to assess the defining characteristics of the AOC role. Phase 1 emphasizes a task-oriented approach to identify what AOCs need to be able to do. Phase 2 builds on the findings of Phase 1. Phase 2 advances our understanding of how AOCs do their jobs and the individual-level attributes that are necessary to carry out the identified tasks in an effective manner.

- Phase 1: Behavior-oriented job analysis based upon Bartram’s (2005) Great Eight
  -- Evaluate AOC competency factors that are instrumental to desired outcomes at USAFA using a validated model of workplace performance
  -- Competency factors consist of 112 competency component titles (i.e., behaviors) that are derived from analysis of a wide range of published and practitioner models; these behaviors can be learned, directly observed, and reliably measured
  -- Introduce exploratory items to inform the design of Phase 2 (e.g., additional behaviors and characteristics, barriers to success, and AOCs’ roles in combating sexual harassment and violence)

- Phase 2: Worker-oriented (e.g., attributes and characteristics) and cognitive task analysis (e.g., identifying thought processes and knowledge required for task completion)
  -- Supplement Phase 1 findings in with structured interviews and critical incident analysis
  -- Evaluate broader context of the AOC role (e.g., interpersonal relationships, physical work conditions, and structural characteristics of the organization)

- Phase 3: Design & Implementation
  -- Analyze Phase 1 and 2 findings
  -- Identify functional linkages and gaps between KSAOs, AOC tasks, and USAFA’s performance expectations
  -- Present findings and make recommendations to USAFA senior leaders
  -- Apply evidence-based practice to inform the design and structure of the AOC Program at USAFA and UCCS

CONCLUSION

The design of the AOC Program functions to develop and prepare officers to lead a cadre squadron at the United States Air Force Academy. The conceptual framework for the Master’s program is based on leadership competency models, a process model, and Air Force Doctrine on leadership development. The essence of the framework rests upon two fundamental ideas: who you are is how you lead, and how you lead drives organizational-level results. Implementing an AOC job analysis is essential to identifying the desired characteristics of AOCs, how this role functions at USAFA, and what developmental interventions are required to achieve success.
AOC Job Analysis

Welcome
As the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Master’s Program enters its 21st year, the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) is conducting an assessment to determine what behaviors define effective performance for AOCs. Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this important effort.

Participation
Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the survey or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer for any reason. We estimate that it will take approximately 30 minutes to complete this survey.

Benefit
Your responses to this survey are very important helping USAFA understand varying perspectives on what an effective AOC should be able to do. Data gained through this assessment will be used to plan and implement education and training efforts.

Risks
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study.

Confidentiality
Your survey answers will be sent to a link at SurveyMonkey.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Survey Monkey does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

At the end of the survey you will be asked if you are interested in participating in an additional interview (e.g., by phone, in person, or email). If you choose to be contacted, you will be redirected to another survey link to provide your contact information. This ensures your answers on the current survey remain completely anonymous.
For this question you are being asked to rate 112 work-related behaviors on three scales. For each behavior:

1. Rate how important the specified behavior is for an AOC to be effective in their job.
2. Rate how often an AOC is required to use the specified behavior to be effective in their job.
3. Provide a self-rating on your personal skill level for the specified behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Ratings</th>
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<th>Frequency of behavior for AOC</th>
<th>Personal skill level of behavior for SELF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking Calculated Risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Team Spirit</td>
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<td>Gaining Agreement</td>
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<td>Thinking Quickly</td>
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<td>Learning Quickly</td>
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<td>Promoting Ideas</td>
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<td>Driving Projects to Results</td>
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<td>Setting and Developing Strategy</td>
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<td>Demonstrating Commitment</td>
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2. In 50 words or less, the purpose of an AOC is to:
3. What work-related behaviors not specified in this survey are critical to AOC effectiveness? Please share your comments and observations here.

4. What other characteristics or experiences not specified in this survey are critical to AOC effectiveness? Please share your comments and observations here.
5. What are the barriers to AOC effectiveness? Please share your comments and observations here.

6. What are the most important things an AOC can do to reduce sexual harassment and violence at USAFA?
Organizational Experience

7. My current role is
   - [ ] AMT
   - [ ] AOC
   - [ ] AOC Master’s Program Student
   - [ ] Cadet
   - [ ] Coach
   - [ ] Faculty
   - [ ] Group AOC
   - [ ] Staff
   - [ ] Other (please specify)

8. Using the calendar, please select the approximate date that you started your current role.

Date / Time
9. My current organization or employer is
   ◯ UCCS
   ◯ USAFA/AD
   ◯ USAFA/CW
   ◯ USAFA/DF
   ◯ USAFA/HQ
   ◯ USAFA/PL
   ◯ 10 ABW
   ◯ 12 FTW
   ◯ Other (please specify)

10. I attend or attended USAFA as a cadet
    ◯ True
    ◯ False

11. I have served in the armed forces
    ◯ True
    ◯ False

12. I have experience as a Squadron AOC at USAFA
    ◯ True
    ◯ False

13. I am a graduate of the AOC Master's Program at UCCS
    ◯ True
    ◯ False

14. How many total years of experience do you have at USAFA?

15. I have children that attend or attended USAFA
    ◯ True
    ◯ False
16. I have children that are serving in the armed forces
   ○ True
   ○ False

17. The description that best fits me is
   ○ Cadet
   ○ Civilian
   ○ Civilian Instructor (AD-21)
   ○ Civilian Professor (AD-22 to AD-24)
   ○ Civilian (GS-1 to GS-12)
   ○ Civilian (GS-13+)
   ○ E-1 to E-4
   ○ E-5 to E-7
   ○ E-8 to E-9
   ○ O-1 to O-3
   ○ O-4 to O-5
   ○ O-6
   ○ O-7+
   ○ Other (please specify)

18. In a typical week, I spend most of my time contributing to efforts that directly affect cadet leadership development.
   ○ Strongly agree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Strongly disagree
19. In a typical week, I spend most of my time working with cadets in-person.

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree
Demographic Information

20. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Other (please specify)

21. What is your relationship status?
   - Married
   - Widowed
   - Divorced
   - Separated
   - Single, Never Married
   - Long-term Committed Relationship
   - Other (please specify)
22. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree

23. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- White / Caucasian
- Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

24. What is your age?
- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your ideas are very important to us.

If you are willing to be contacted to talk about your observations of the AOC role at USAFA, please click the link below to be redirected to a new window. As a reminder, your responses to the current survey will remain completely anonymous.

[Click Here to Provide Your Contact Information]
Contact Information for Additional Interview

Thank you!
Thank you for your willingness to be contacted to answer additional questions. Your contact information will be sent to a link at SurveyMonkey.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format.

Providing your contact information is voluntary. If you choose to provide contact information, your survey responses for the AOC Job Analysis you just completed remain anonymous.

1. If you are willing to be contacted via email, please enter a valid email address

2. If you are willing to be contacted via phone, please enter a valid phone number
Appendix G

IRB Approval

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

11 May 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR Lt Col Hans Larsen and Lt Col Robert Reimer

FROM: HQ USAFA/A9O (USAFA IRB)

SUBJECT: IRB approval for the use of human subjects in research

1. Protocol title: AOC Masters Program Preparation as Leader Developers

2. Protocol number: FAC20170045H

3. Risk: Minimal

4. IRB Approval date: 20 April 2017

5. Expiration date: 19 April 2018

6. Continuing Review Report due: 1 April 2018

7. Type of review: Initial Review – Full Board

8. Approved number of subjects: 12

9. Assurance Number and Expiration Date: DoD Assurance 50046, expiration 15 March 2017

10. Training Expiration Dates: Reimer, 23 Sep 17; Larsen, 9 Mar 18

11. The above protocol has been reviewed and approved by the USAFA IRB at the 20 April 2017 meeting. All requirements, as set by the IRB and its legal counsel, have been fully complied with. Please note that the USAFA Authorized Institutional Official, HQ USAFA/AV and the Surgeon General’s Research Oversight & Compliance Division, AFMSA/SGE-C review all USAFA IRB actions and may amend this decision or identify additional requirements. The study is minimal risk. Include the following statements at the bottom of your recruitment material: ‘Approved: HQ USAFA IRB FAC2017045H.’ ‘Expiration date of this protocol is 19 April 2018.’ This will inform potential subjects that your research has been reviewed and approved. Attached is a final informed consent document (ICD) for you to use for this study.

12. Any adverse reactions or issues resulting from this study should be reported immediately to the IRB Chair or Administrator. Instructions and forms are at: http://www.usafa.af.mil/Leadership/InstitutionalReviewBoard/ProtocolViolationsandAdverseEvents.aspx

13. Amendments to the protocol and/or revisions to informed consent documents must have IRB approval before they are implemented. Please retain both a hard copy and electronic copy of the final approved protocol and informed consent document. Instructions and forms are at: http://www.usafa.af.mil/Leadership/InstitutionalReviewBoard/Amendments.aspx

Developing Leaders of Character
14. All inquiries and correspondence concerning this protocol should include the protocol number and name of the primary investigator. Please ensure the timely submission of all required progress and final reports. Please note that any reminders reference upcoming expiration dates are a courtesy and it is the investigators’ responsibility to keep track of their expiration dates and submit their documents to the IRB on time.

15. Per DoDI3216.02_AFI40-402, Enclosure 2, 11.f., you must retain all research records (e.g., protocol, signed informed consent documents, IRB correspondence, and data) for at least three years after the research ends or for the length of time specified in applicable regulations, or institutional or sponsor requirements, whichever is longer. You must transfer research records to another PI or keep them with you and provide new contact information if you leave USAFA before the 3 years is over. In either case, you must inform the HRPP office that you are leaving USAFA.

16. If you have any questions or if I can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me at 333-6593.

Laura J. Neal  
HQ USAFA IRB Administrator

Attachment: Approved ICD
MEMORANDUM FOR Lt Col Hans Larsen
Lt Col Robert Reimer

FROM: HQ USAFA/AJO (USAFA IRB)

SUBJECT: IRB approval to amend a protocol for research involving human subjects

1. Protocol title: AOC Masters Program Preparation as Leader Developers
2. Protocol number: FAC20170045H
3. Risk: Minimal
4. Amendment Approval date: 12 April 2018
5. Protocol Approval date: 12 April 2018
6. Protocol Expiration date: 11 April 2019
7. Date next continuing/final report is due: 1 March 2019
8. Amendment number: 1
9. Type of review: Amendment Approval

☐ Full Board
☒ Expedited under category 32 CFR 219.110 (b) (2)

10. Assurance Number and Expiration Date: DoD Assurance 50046, expiration 31 December 2019
11. Training Expiration Dates: Reimer, 27Oct18; Larsen, 8Mar19
12. Purpose of the Amendment: Increase the number of subjects from 12 to 30.

13. The above protocol amendment has been reviewed and approved. All requirements, as set by the IRB and its legal counsel, have been fully complied with. Please note that the USAFA Authorized Institutional Official, HQ USAFA/CO, and the Surgeon General’s Research Oversight & Compliance Division, AFMSA/SGE-C review all USAFA IRB actions and may identify additional requirements. The study is minimal risk.

14. Any adverse reactions or issues resulting from this study should be reported immediately to the IRB Chair or Administrator. Instructions and forms are at:

Developing Leaders of Character
15. All inquiries and correspondence concerning this protocol should include the protocol number and name of the primary investigator. Please ensure the timely submission of all required progress and final reports. Please note that any reminders reference upcoming expiration dates are a courtesy and it is the investigators' responsibility to keep track of their expiration dates and submit their documents to the IRB on time.

16. Per DoDE3216.02_AFI40-402, Enclosure 2, 11.f., you must retain all research records (e.g., protocol, signed informed consent documents, IRB correspondence, and data) for at least three years after the research ends or for the length of time specified in applicable regulations, or institutional or sponsor requirements, whichever is longer. You must transfer research records to another PI or keep them with you and provide new contact information if you leave USAFA before the 3 years is over. In either case, you must inform the HRPP office that you are leaving USAFA.

17. If you have any questions or if I can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me at 333-6593 or the IRB Chair, Dr. Silz-Carson at 333-2597.

[Signature]

LAURA J. NEAL
HQ USAFA IRB Administrator
MEMORANDUM FOR Lt Col Hans Larsen
   Lt Col Robert Reimer

FROM: HQ USAFA/A9O (USAFA IRB)

SUBJECT: Continued IRB approval for research involving human subjects

1. Protocol title: AOC Masters Program Preparation as Leader Developers
2. Protocol number: FAC20170645H
3. Risk: Minimal
4. IRB Approval date: 21 Feb 2019
5. Expiration date: 20 Feb 2020
6. Date next continuing/final report is due: 01 Feb 2020
7. Type of review: Full Board
8. Assurance Number and Expiration Date: DoD Assurance 50046, expiration 31 December 2019.
10. The Continuing Progress Report of the above protocol has been reviewed and approved by the USAFA IRB. All requirements, as set by the IRB and its legal counsel, have been fully complied with. Please note that the USAFA Authorized Institutional Official, HQ USAFA/CV and the Surgeon General’s Research Oversight & Compliance Division, AFMSA/SGE-C review all USAFA IRB actions and may amend this decision or identify additional requirements.

   Progress: Estimated to be 60% complete. Estimated completion date is 31 Aug 2019.

11. There is no grace period beyond the expiration date listed in #5 of this form. Reminder emails of your upcoming expiration date are a courtesy. It is ultimately your responsibility to submit your continuing review report for approval by the IRB by the Due Date in #6. Please keep this letter in your protocol file as proof of IRB approval and as a helpful reminder of your expiration date. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in closure of your protocol and suspension of further research at USAFA.

12. Any adverse reactions or issues resulting from this study should be reported immediately to the IRB Chair or Administrator. Instructions and forms are at: http://www.usafa.af.mil/Leadership/InstitutionalReviewBoard/ProtocolViolationsandAdverseEvents.aspx

   Developing Leaders of Character
13. Amendments to the protocol and/or revisions to informed consent documents must have IRB approval **before** they are implemented. Please retain both a hard copy and electronic copy of the final approved protocol and informed consent document. Instructions and forms are at: http://www.usafa.af.mil/Leadership/InstitutionalReviewBoard/Amendments.aspx

14. All inquiries and correspondence concerning this protocol should include the protocol number and name of the primary investigator. Please ensure the timely submission of all required progress and final reports. Please note that any reminders reference upcoming expiration dates are a courtesy and it is the investigators’ responsibility to keep track of their expiration dates and submit their documents to the IRB on time.

15. Per DoDI3216.02_AFI40-402, Enclosure 2, 11.f., you must retain all research records (e.g., protocol, signed informed consent documents, IRB correspondence, and data) for at least three years after the research ends or for the length of time specified in applicable regulations, or institutional or sponsor requirements, whichever is longer. You must transfer research records to another PI or keep them with you and provide new contact information if you leave USAFA before the 3 years is over. In either case, you must inform the HRPP office that you are leaving USAFA.

16. If you have any questions or if I can be of further assistance, please don’t hesitate to contact me at 333-6593.

[Signature]

LAURA J. NEAL  
HQ USAFA IRB Administrator
UCCS and USAFA Institutional Agreement for IRB Review (IAIR)

Department of Defense
Human Research Protection Program

AF ISSUED DOD INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT
FOR INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) REVIEW (IAIR)

General Instructions to Institutions and IRBs

- This form is should be used when an institution will be engaged in human subject research and will use an Institutional Review Board (IRB) that is not organizationally or legally part of the institution. This Agreement will help ensure that the engaged institution with the federal assurance and the IRB providing the review and approval of the research (in accordance with 32 CFR 219 and DoD Instruction 3216.02) know the responsibilities of each party to this agreement. Contact AFMSA/SGE-C for guidance if you want to submit an equivalent agreement or want to alter this form.

- This agreement will become an amendment to your DoD Assurance.

- Contact your DoD Component Headquarters office (or DoD sponsor) for guidance if you have questions.

- Follow your DoD Component Headquarters office (or DoD sponsor) instructions for paper or electronic submission.

- The "Institution Relying on the IRB Services" is the institution engaged in the research. The "Institution supplying the IRB Services" is the IRB or organization with the IRB.

- For DoD-sponsored extramural research: This agreement is needed only for the external IRBs that will review DoD-sponsored research. It is not needed for any IRBs that review research not supported by DoD.
Department of Defense
Human Research Protection Program

AF ISSUED DOD INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT
FOR INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) REVIEW

BETWEEN

INSTITUTION RELYING ON THE IRB SERVICES: University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS)

AND

INSTITUTION SUPPLYING IRB SERVICES: USAF Academy (USAFA)

PART 1
INSTITUTION INFORMATION

This DoD Institutional Agreement for IRB Review describes the responsibilities of the engaged institution and the institution with the IRB. This Agreement, when signed, becomes part of the engaged institution’s Federal Assurance for the Protection of Human Research Subjects approved by DoD (and may become part of the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)).

A. Engaged Institution Relying on the IRB

Name: University of Colorado at Colorado Springs
DoD Assurance Number (if applicable): N/A
DHHS FWA Number (if applicable): FWA00002481
DHHS IRB Number* (if applicable): IRB00000973
DoD Addendum to the DHHS FWA Number (if applicable): F50361

B. Institution Supplying the IRB Services

Name: USAF Academy
DoD Assurance Number: F50046
DoD IRB Number* (if applicable): FWA00019017
DHHS FWA Number (if applicable): IORG0006125
DHHS IRB Number* (if applicable):
DoD Addendum to the DHHS FWA Number (if applicable): N/A

*Provide for each IRB that is part of this agreement.
C. Scope

This agreement applies to all research performed by these institutions on a case-by-case basis. Determination of the responsible IRB is to be based on location of the subject/patient population, funding, Principal Investigator’s affiliation, and other decisional factors. The decision will be made collaboratively by Chairs of the UCCS IRB and USAFA IRB and their respective Human Protections Administrators. If there is disagreement, the Chair of USAFA IRB and the Chair of the UCCS IRB will determine which IRB should review a particular study or elect to have both IRBs review.

D. Effective Dates

This Agreement is effective as of the date approved and signed by the DoD Component Designated Official and expires on the date listed in the DoD approval document.

PART 2
INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

All institutions are responsible for ensuring that their personnel (i.e., the Institutional Official, the IRB, IRB office staff, investigators and research staff, and any other personnel supporting research covered by this Agreement) act in accordance with all applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations (e.g., Title 32 Code of Federal Regulations Part 219 (32 CFR 219); Title 10 United States Code Section 980 (10 USC 980); DoD Directives and Instructions (e.g., DoDI 3216.02); 45 CFR Part 46 (Subparts B, C, and D as made applicable by DoDD 3216.02); DoD Component policies; and the Food and Drug Administration regulations and guidance (e.g., 21 CFR Parts 50, 56, 312, and 812) where applicable in addition to the terms and conditions of the organizations’ DoD Assurance and/or their DHHS FWA.

Specific DoD Component requirements are stated in Part 3 of this document.

All institutions will permit, upon request, the inspection of any facilities used in support of the activities described in the “Scope” and other research areas by federal agencies responsible for oversight of human research protection and proper management of the research within the scope of this agreement.

A. The Institutional Official of the Engaged Institution Relying on the IRB will:

1. Ensure that all institutional personnel involved in the research (covered within the scope of this agreement) have completed education and training requirements.

2. Verify that scientific review of the research protocol has been conducted and that the IRB considered the feedback from the scientific review.
3. Verify that the IRB has reviewed the research protocol in accordance with DoD requirements, including those identified in the research contract or agreement.

4. Ensure institutional personnel comply with requirements and oversight established by the IRB.

5. Ensure institutional personnel follow the approved research protocol.

6. Ensure institutional personnel report to the IRB and DoD: (a) unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others; (b) serious or continuing non-compliance; (c) suspension or termination of IRB approval; and (d) any other events or circumstances requiring notification.

7. Ensure institutional personnel maintain current copies of the IRB approved research protocol (initial review, continuing review, amendments, adverse event reports, and final report), all communications with the IRB, this Agreement, and other relevant information in accordance with DoD record keeping requirements.

8. Verify the IRB has the expertise and policies and procedures needed to review and oversee the research submitted by the institution (in accordance with 32 CFR 219.107, §.103(b)(3), and §.115).

B. The Institution Supplying the Reviewing IRB will:

1. Verify that personnel involved in the research have completed required education and training for the protection of human research subjects.

2. Verify that the IRB is properly constituted for reviewing the study.

3. Fulfill the IRB responsibilities identified in the engaged institution’s assurance.

4. Provide the Institutional Official of the engaged institution with information about the IRB, such as a list of IRB members or expertise and the written procedures for executing IRB responsibilities in accordance with paragraph A.8 above.

5. Provide to the engaged institution conducting the research and the Principal Investigator(s) a copy of the IRB review and determinations concerning the research (e.g., IRB minutes or other appropriate documents).

6. Maintain current copies of the IRB approved research protocol (initial review, continuing review, amendments, adverse events reports, and final report), all communications with the institution, this Agreement, and other relevant information in accordance with DoD Component record-keeping requirements.
C. Amendments and Termination

1. This Agreement may be modified, cancelled, or renegotiated upon mutual consent, at any time through an amendment signed by authorized representatives of the organizations. A decision to amend or terminate will be submitted to the DoD Component Designated Oversight Official.

2. The DoD Component Designated Official is not obligated to approve this Agreement.

PART 3
DOD COMPONENT REQUIREMENTS

A. This institution will comply with the requirements of the DoD Component issuing this Agreement. These requirements are identified in Part 3, paragraph B. DoD Components may require that other research, not specifically identified by 32 CFR 219, also comply with the terms of this Agreement (32 CFR 219.101(d)).

B. When this institution conducts research supported by or in collaboration with an organization of another DoD Component, this institution must comply with the policies and procedures of that organization. The requirements of selected DoD Components are identified below:

Department of the Army
- AR 70-25 Use of Volunteers as Subjects of Research, 25 January 1990
- AR 40-38, Clinical Investigation Program, 1 September 1989
- AR 40-7, Use of Investigational Drugs in Humans and the Use of Schedule I Controlled Drug Substances, 4 January 1991

Department of the Navy
- SECNAVINST 3900.39D of 6 November 2006

Department of the Air Force
- Air Force Instruction 40-402, Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Office of the Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
- HA Policy 05-003
PART 4
INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT

A. Engaged Institution Relying on the External IRB

1. Institutional Signatory Official at the Engaged Institution

Acting in an authorized capacity on behalf of this institution and with an understanding of the institution's responsibilities under its assurance, I assure protections for human subjects as specified above.

Signature: [Signature] Date: 4/10/17

Name: Kelli Klebe
Rank/Grade: N/A
Institutional Title: Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Faculty Development
Mailing Address: 1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO 80918
Email Address: kklebe@uccs.edu
Telephone Number: 719-255-3779
FAX Number: 719-255-3706

2. Primary Contact for Human Research Protection at the Engaged Institution

Name: Michael Sanderson
Rank/Grade: N/A
Institutional Title: Associate Director
Office of Sponsored Programs
Mailing Address: 1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO 80918
Email Address: IRB@uccs.edu
Telephone Number: 719-255-3044
FAX Number: 719-255-3706
B. Institution with the Reviewing IRB

1. Reviewing IRB Chair Agreement

Acting in an authorized capacity on behalf of the IRB and with an understanding of the institution's responsibilities under this assurance, I assure protections for human subjects as specified above.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: 3 March 2017

Name: Katherine Silz-Carson
Rank/Grade: Professor
Institutional Title: Department Economics and Geography
Mailing Address: 2354 Fairchild Hall, Suite 6H100
Telephone Number: 719-333-2597
Email Address: Katherine.Silz-Carson@usafa.edu

2. Institutional Official of Institution with the Reviewing IRB

I am aware that my IRB is entering into this agreement.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: 15 Mar 17

Name: David A. Harris, Jr.
Rank/Grade: Colonel
Institutional Title: Vice Superintendent
Mailing Address: 2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 3300, USAFA CO 80840
Telephone Number: 719-333-3110
FAX Number: 719-333-4146
Email Address: David.Harris@usafa.edu

3. Primary Contact for Human Research Protection at the Institution with the Reviewing IRB

Name: Laura Neal
Rank/Grade: GS-11
Institutional Title: IRB Administrator
Mailing Address: 2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 3800, USAFA CO 80840
Telephone Number: 719-333-6593
FAX Number: 719-333-4146
Email Address: laura.neal@usafa.edu