Enhancing Personal and Leadership Development among Hospitality and Tourism Students through CHTM Student Council Activities: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: *Student councils play a vital role in promoting student engagement, leadership formation, and holistic development in higher education, particularly in hospitality and tourism programs where service-oriented competencies are essential. This study evaluated the role of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management (CHTM) Student Council in enhancing the personal and leadership development of students at Gordon College. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected CHTM students who actively participated in student council activities. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and identify emerging patterns in students' experiences. The findings revealed six major themes: meaningful personal growth through service and engagement; strengthened personal and leadership development; development of core leadership and interpersonal competencies; high relevance and holistic benefits of student council activities; difficulty balancing academic responsibilities with student council participation; and the need for more skill-focused and development-oriented programs. Results indicate that involvement in CHTM Student Council activities fostered inclusivity, a sense of belonging, confidence, leadership skills, communication competence, teamwork, and social responsibility. Despite these positive outcomes, participants also experienced challenges related to time management, scheduling conflicts, personal limitations, and financial constraints. The study concludes that the CHTM Student Council serves as an effective platform for experiential learning and student development, although continuous program enhancement and institutional support are necessary to maximize its impact.*

Keywords: *student leadership; student council; personal development; leadership development; hospitality and tourism education; experiential learning*

I. INTRODUCTION

Student councils are recognized as formal student-led organizations that represent the collective voice of learners while serving as platforms for leadership development, service, and experiential learning within higher education institutions (Astin, 1999). In academic programs such as hospitality and tourism management where interpersonal skills, professionalism, and service excellence are fundamental student councils play a crucial role in bridging classroom learning with real-world application (Kolb, 1984; Su et al., 2016). Through structured activities, advocacy, and community engagement, student councils contribute significantly to students' personal, social, and leadership development.

Student leadership organizations serve as essential platforms for experiential learning in higher education, particularly in hospitality and tourism programs where interpersonal skills, leadership, and service orientation are critical competencies (Kolb, 1984; Su et al., 2016).

Personal and leadership development are central to hospitality and tourism education, as graduates are expected to demonstrate emotional intelligence,

adaptability, communication skills, and ethical service (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019). Student council activities, including academic programs, outreach initiatives, and co-curricular events, offer opportunities for students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, thereby enhancing self-efficacy, leadership capacity, and social responsibility (Astin, 1999).

Learners while serving as platforms for leadership development, service, and experiential learning within higher education institutions (Astin, 1999). In academic programs such as hospitality and tourism management where interpersonal skills, professionalism, and service excellence are fundamental student councils play a crucial role in bridging classroom learning with real-world application (Kolb, 1984; Su et al., 2016). Through structured activities, advocacy, and community engagement, student councils contribute significantly to students' personal, social, and leadership development.

The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management (CHTM) Student Council of Gordon College functions as the official student leadership body representing CHTM students. Its primary role is to plan, organize, and implement academic, co-curricular, and community-based activities that support student welfare, leadership formation, and professional readiness. The council also serves as a liaison between students, faculty, and administration, ensuring that student concerns are addressed while promoting unity, inclusivity, and active participation within the college. By fostering collaboration and service-oriented initiatives, the CHTM Student Council embodies the values of hospitality, responsibility, and community engagement essential to the tourism and hospitality industry.

Participation in CHTM Student Council activities provides students with opportunities to assume leadership roles, manage events, collaborate with diverse stakeholders, and engage in outreach programs. These experiences encourage self-awareness, confidence, teamwork, and a sense of purpose key components of personal development (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019). Moreover, involvement in student governance enables learners to develop emotional intelligence, adaptability, and ethical leadership, which are increasingly valued in the hospitality and tourism sector (Neuhofer & Varkaris, 2017).

Despite the active role of the CHTM Student Council in student engagement, there is limited empirical research examining how its activities contribute to the personal and leadership development of hospitality and tourism students from their own perspectives. While student

councils are often assumed to be beneficial, systematic evaluation is necessary to understand the depth of their impact, identify challenges faced by participants, and determine areas for improvement (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Baxter & Jack, 2015). In the context of Gordon College, such evaluation is essential to ensure that student-led initiatives remain relevant, inclusive, and aligned with institutional and industry expectations.

Thus, this study aims to explore the activities of the CHTM Student Council and examine their role in enhancing the personal and leadership development of students in the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management of Gordon College. By exploring students' experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and recommendations, the study seeks to provide insights that may guide student leaders, faculty advisers, and administrators in strengthening student-centered leadership and development programs in hospitality and tourism education

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative study design, which is appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences within a specific institutional context (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Yin, 2018). The case under investigation was the CHTM Student Council of Gordon College and its activities related to student development.

Participants consisted of selected students from the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management who had actively participated in student council activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing respondents to freely express their experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding their involvement. This approach enabled the researchers to capture rich, descriptive data relevant to personal growth, leadership development, challenges, and program effectiveness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Key words and significant statements were identified, coded, and grouped into subthemes, which were then clustered into major themes. Trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through careful data organization, consistent coding, and validation of themes against participants' responses..

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's main findings are presented in the section that follows to provide a clearer understanding of the experiences of students from the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management (CHTM) of Gordon College in relation to their participation in Student Council activities. These findings are organized into major themes and corresponding subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with the participants. Each theme highlights significant aspects of the students' experiences—ranging from personal growth, leadership development, and skill enhancement to perceived benefits, challenges, and suggested improvements—offering a comprehensive view of how CHTM Student Council activities contribute to students' holistic development.

Major Theme 1: Meaningful Personal Growth Through Service and Engagement

Participants described their involvement in the CHTM Student Council as emotionally meaningful and development-oriented, largely due to a strong sense of inclusivity and belonging. Feeling welcomed and valued fostered a supportive environment that encouraged self-expression, confidence, and personal growth. This finding aligns with Astin's (1999) Student Involvement Theory and Tinto's (2017) assertion that a sense of belonging enhances student engagement and development.

Subtheme 1.1: Enhanced Sense of Belonging and Inclusivity

Students emphasized that the inclusive culture of the council made them feel accepted and connected, strengthening their emotional attachment to the organization and the college community. Inclusive student organizations are known to promote psychological safety and active participation, particularly in collaborative disciplines such as hospitality and tourism (Strayhorn, 2019; Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019).

"The CHTM Student Council is very inclusive… they will not treat you as an outsider but a family." – Student 1

Subtheme 1.2: Joyful and Impactful Participation in Events and Community Service

Participants described council activities as enjoyable and fulfilling, especially those involving community service. These experiences generated emotional satisfaction and reinforced students' sense of purpose, supporting prior findings that service-oriented engagement enhances motivation and social responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 2025).

"One of the most unforgettable moments… seeing students happy made all the effort rewarding." – Student 10

Subtheme 1.3: Development of Skills, Confidence, and Responsibility

Student council involvement enabled participants to develop leadership, communication, and organizational skills while increasing confidence and accountability. These outcomes support experiential learning and leadership development theories, which emphasize learning through active participation and responsibility (Kolb, 1984; Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

"Every activity we handled taught me something new—from planning and organizing events to communicating and leading others."- Student 4

Major Theme 2: Strengthened Personal and Leadership Development

Participants consistently reported that involvement in the CHTM Student Council significantly enhanced their confidence, leadership abilities, communication skills, and capacity to manage responsibilities. Through hands-on activities, mentorship, and continuous teamwork, students became more self-aware, empowered, and capable of taking initiative. These findings support experiential learning and student leadership development literature, which emphasize that active participation in student organizations promotes leadership competence, self-efficacy, and purposeful engagement (Astin, 1999; Kolb, 2004).

"Being part of the CHTM Student Council helped me grow in so many ways… I gained more confidence in speaking… learned how to handle pressure, manage time, and communicate better."- Student 7

Subtheme 2.1: Improved Communication and Public Speaking Skills

Many respondents shared that their involvement led to noticeable improvements in communication and public speaking. Frequent participation in meetings, events, and collaborative tasks helped students express themselves more confidently and articulate their ideas effectively. This aligns with studies indicating that leadership roles in student organizations enhance communication competence and self-confidence (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019).

Subtheme 2.2: Enhanced Teamwork and Collaboration

Student council activities strengthened participants' ability to collaborate, build trust, and work effectively with others. Students recognized the importance of teamwork in successfully implementing activities, reflecting the collaborative nature of hospitality and tourism professions (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019).

"I saw how we help each other just to make an activity push through." – Student 9

Subtheme 2.3: Increased Confidence, Responsibility, and Purposeful Leadership

Participants reported becoming more confident and responsible leaders who understand leadership as service beyond institutional boundaries. Managing tasks under pressure and engaging in community-oriented activities encouraged students to lead with purpose and social responsibility. This finding aligns with leadership development research emphasizing ethical, service-oriented leadership in higher education (Astin, 1999; Jacoby, 2015).

"It taught me that being a student leader does not end within the school—it goes beyond helping the community." – Student 5

Major Theme 3: Development of Core Leadership and Interpersonal Competencies

Participants consistently highlighted the development of essential leadership and interpersonal competencies through their involvement in the CHTM Student Council. These included improved communication, enhanced leadership abilities, effective time management, and increased empathy—skills that strengthened their capacity to collaborate, serve others, and manage responsibilities effectively. Such outcomes align with experiential and student leadership development frameworks, which emphasize learning through active engagement and social interaction (Kolb, 1984; Astin, 1999).

"I developed leadership, teamwork, and time management skills through my involvement in the council." – Student 1

Subtheme 3.1: Strengthened Communication and Public Speaking Skills

Many students reported significant improvements in their ability to communicate confidently, articulate ideas, and engage with diverse individuals. Continuous exposure to meetings, events, and leadership roles enhanced students' self-awareness and communication competence. These findings support prior studies indicating that student leadership participation enhances communication and self-reflective skills (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019).

"I developed my communication skills… I learned what I'm good at, what I need to improve, and how to leverage my skills." – Student 3

Subtheme 3.2: Enhanced Leadership, Responsibility, and Professionalism

Participants described growth in leadership qualities such as decision-making, accountability, professionalism, and compassion. They recognized leadership as a service-oriented role that requires empathy and ethical responsibility. This reflects contemporary leadership models emphasizing purposeful and values-driven leadership in higher education (Astin, 1999; Jacoby, 2015).

"I discovered that I have my own leadership skill… it needs compassion, and that's what I discovered—that I am compassionate enough to serve others."- Student 5

Subtheme 3.3: Growth in Teamwork, Empathy, and Social Responsibility

Students reported becoming more effective team players and more socially aware individuals. Engagement in collaborative and service-based activities fostered empathy, adaptability, and a deeper sense of social responsibility. These competencies are essential in hospitality and tourism professions, where teamwork and social sensitivity are critical to service excellence (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019).

"I've developed… a deeper sense of social responsibility and the importance of patience, adaptability, and collaboration with others."- Student 6

Major Theme 4: High Relevance and Holistic Benefit of CHTM Student Council Activities

Participants overwhelmingly perceived the CHTM Student Council activities as meaningful, relevant, and beneficial to their overall development. They emphasized that the activities extend beyond academic enrichment by supporting personal growth, industry preparedness, community engagement, and student well-being. These findings are consistent with holistic student development models, which stress the integration of academic, personal, and social learning experiences (Astin, 1999; Kolb, 1984).

"The activities are very beneficial because they don't just focus on academics, but also on building confidence, teamwork, and leadership… These activities really help us grow and prepare for our future careers." – Student 9

Subtheme 4.1: Enhancement of Academic, Industry, and Real-Life Skills

Many students highlighted that participation strengthened essential hospitality and tourism competencies such as communication, service orientation, confidence, and professionalism. These skills align with industry expectations and enhance students' readiness for real-world work environments. Prior research affirms that experiential and co-curricular activities effectively bridge academic learning with industry-relevant skill development (Su et al., 2016; Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019).

"The activities are designed to enhance both academic learning and real-life skills needed in the tourism and hospitality industry."- Student 11

Subtheme 4.2: Contribution to Personal Growth, Well-Being, and Student Engagement

Respondents reported that student council activities contributed positively to their well-being by reducing academic stress, promoting social interaction, and strengthening community bonds. Such engagement supports students' mental, emotional, and social health, reinforcing the role of co-curricular involvement in student wellness and engagement (Strayhorn, 2019; Tinto, 2017).

"The activities gave students a break from academic stress… helped them grow, interact, and feel more connected as a community." – Student 3

Subtheme 4.3: Promotion of Community Awareness, Service, and Hospitality Values

Students noted that the activities instilled values of community service, environmental awareness, and genuine hospitality. These values are central to responsible and sustainable tourism practices, emphasizing the importance of empowering local communities and protecting shared resources (Su et al., 2016; Neuhofer & Varkaris, 2017).

"These activities focus on helping the communities and the environment… Our industry relies on locals and the environment, so we should be empowering and protecting it."- Student 7

Major Theme 5: Difficulty Balancing Academic Responsibilities with Student Council Participation

Despite the positive impacts of CHTM Student Council involvement, most participants identified time constraints, heavy academic workload, and scheduling conflicts as significant barriers to consistent participation. Balancing academic demands with student leadership responsibilities often created stress and limited students' ability to engage fully in council activities. These findings are consistent with existing literature indicating that student leaders frequently struggle to manage competing academic and co-curricular commitments (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 2017).

"Balancing my academic workload with student council activities… time management and schedule conflicts sometimes make it hard to participate fully."- Student 8

Subtheme 5.1: Scheduling Conflicts and Limited Availability

Students commonly reported that council activities overlapped with classes, personal responsibilities, or rest periods, making attendance difficult. Such scheduling conflicts reduced participation and heightened stress, underscoring the need for better alignment between academic schedules and co-curricular programming. Previous studies suggest that flexible scheduling enhances student engagement and retention in co-curricular activities (Strayhorn, 2019).

"The time availability… sometimes the event date and time doesn't match our schedules."- Student 2

Subtheme 5.2: Personal Limitations Such as Shyness, Anxiety, or Lack of Experience

Some participants cited personal barriers, including shyness, anxiety, and limited experience, as factors that affected their confidence and willingness to participate. However, involvement in student council activities also provided opportunities for gradual personal growth and confidence-building, consistent with experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984).

"Maybe me being shy, but somehow I was able to develop because of the activities."- Student 10

Subtheme 5.3: Financial and Logistical Constraints

A number of students identified financial limitations and logistical challenges, such as transportation costs and distance from school, as obstacles to participation. These constraints highlight the importance of institutional support to ensure equitable access to student leadership opportunities (Tinto, 2017).

"Financial limitations and transportation expenses can also make it difficult to join every event."- Student 5

Major Theme 6: Need for More Skill-Focused and Development-Oriented Programs

Participants emphasized the need for the CHTM Student Council to expand programs that intentionally develop leadership, communication, event management, and other professional competencies. Students expressed that more structured trainings, workshops, and mentorship opportunities would better support their growth as future hospitality and tourism professionals. This finding aligns with literature highlighting the importance of intentional, skill-based co-curricular

programming in higher education (Kolb, 1984; Su et al., 2016).

"The council can improve its programs by organizing more skill-based and leadership development activities."-Student 12

Subtheme 6.1: Increase in Practical, Industry-Relevant Workshops and Trainings

Students recommended more hands-on activities focused on real-world hospitality skills such as customer service, event planning, networking, professionalism, and financial literacy. Practical training opportunities are essential in bridging academic learning with industry expectations and enhancing career readiness (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019; Neuhofer & Varkaris, 2017).

"Maybe more workshops or training focused on real industry skills and personality development."- Student 2

Subtheme 6.2: Strengthened Mentorship, Guidance, and Personalized Support

Participants highlighted the value of mentorship programs, professional talks, and guidance from experienced leaders and industry practitioners. Mentorship has been shown to support leadership development, career clarity, and personal growth among students (Jacoby, 2015; Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

"For me, I think more professional mentorship."- Student 4

Subtheme 6.3: Improved Accessibility Through Better Scheduling and Student Feedback Systems

Students stressed the importance of more flexible scheduling, provision of excuse letters, and open feedback channels to reduce conflicts with academic responsibilities. Such measures can increase participation, reduce stress, and promote inclusive student engagement (Tinto, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019).

"Since the problem is the time availability... providing some excuse letter will help."- Student 6

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the role of the CHTM Student Council in enhancing the personal and leadership development of students in the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management of Gordon College. The findings reveal that participation in student council activities contributes significantly to students' holistic development by fostering a strong sense of belonging, inclusivity, and

purpose. Through service-oriented initiatives and collaborative engagement, students experienced meaningful personal growth, improved confidence, and enhanced interpersonal and leadership competencies.

The results further demonstrate that CHTM Student Council activities are highly relevant and beneficial, supporting not only academic learning but also industry preparedness, community engagement, and student well-being. Participants reported the development of essential hospitality and tourism competencies such as communication, professionalism, teamwork, empathy, and social responsibility skills that are critical in the service-oriented nature of the industry.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identified challenges related to balancing academic responsibilities with student council participation. Time constraints, scheduling conflicts, personal limitations, and financial concerns posed barriers to consistent engagement.

These challenges highlight the need for more structured, accessible, and development-oriented programs. Overall, the study concludes that while the CHTM Student Council serves as an effective platform for student development, continuous program enhancement and institutional support are necessary to maximize its impact.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Enhance Skill-Focused Programs

The CHTM Student Council should design and implement more structured, skill-based activities such as leadership training, communication workshops, event management seminars, and customer service simulations aligned with hospitality and tourism industry standards.

2. Strengthen Mentorship and Professional Guidance

Establish mentorship programs involving faculty advisers, alumni, and industry practitioners to provide students with guidance, career direction, and real-world insights that support leadership and professional development.

3. Improve Scheduling and Accessibility of Activities

Activity schedules should be planned in consideration of academic timetables to minimize conflicts. Providing flexible scheduling options, excuse letters, and

alternative participation modes can help increase student involvement.

4. Strengthen Feedback and Evaluation Mechanisms

Regular student feedback should be gathered to assess the relevance and effectiveness of activities. This will allow the Student Council to continuously improve its programs based on students' needs and experiences.

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