

LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN FRATERNITY/SORORITY HOUSING

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The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which members living in fraternity/sorority housing experienced learning outcomes associated with living in a residential learning community. Additionally, the study explored differences in the degree to which selected learning outcomes were achieved by members of fraternities compared to members of sororities. Data were collected by administering the Learning Communities Assessment (Turrentine, 2001) to members living in fraternity and sorority houses at a major research institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Respondents characterized their fraternity/sorority living experience as an important living community, but not as a learning community.

Learning communities have been developed as an out-of-class opportunity to combine in-class and out-of-class learning. Most research on learning communities reports positive outcomes for student participants (Eisenback, 2003; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pike, 1999; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Students living in residential learning communities have significantly higher levels of involvement, faculty and peer interaction, and general integration into collegiate life than do students living in traditional residence halls. Members of learning communities also report making “greater gains in general education than did traditional residence halls students” (Pike, 1999, p. 280). More recently, student participation in learning communities has been found to support the growth of critical-thinking skills and enhance student retention (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003).

Learning communities exist in a variety of formats (Pace, Witucki, & Blumreich, 2008). Most can be categorized as one of six types: (a) Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGS), (b) Linked Courses, (c) Clusters, (d) Coordinated Studies, (e) Federated Learning Communities, and (f) Residentially Based Programs (Lazar, 2002). Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGS) are small groups of freshmen that enroll together in large classes. Students meet weekly with an advisor who encourages students to provide each other with a support network throughout their first year (Lazar, 2002). Linked Courses are two or more classes related by content or skill development with varying numbers of student participants. The common content or skill development encourages students to work together in a given academic area (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Clusters create cohorts of 25 to 30 students in two to four theme-, issue-, problem-, or context-related classes offered during a semester. This format is an expanded version of Linked Courses (Lazar, 2002). Coordinated Studies integrate students into specific curricular programs with block schedules, seminars, and a high degree of faculty involvement (Lazar, 2002). These learning communities tend to remain within specified academic colleges or departments. Federated Learning Communities use three or four topic-related courses and weekly seminars to bring students together for academic discussions. A master learner, typically a faculty member without classes, leads these discussions and encourages student learning (Lazar, 2002). Residentially Based Programs combine in-class activities and study within a common residential setting. Students participate in the same courses, area of study, or other curricular programs while living together

in the same facility. This learning community format creates opportunities for deeper interaction among students and faculty members both in-class and out-of-class (Shapiro & Levine, 1999).

Fraternity/ Sorority Housing

One potential type of residential setting for learning communities is fraternity/sorority housing. While such housing often lacks a structured curricular program, most chapters have academic goals, projects, and services to support their members' academic success. Co-curricular by design, these houses have not been studied as possible learning communities (Wooldridge, personal communication, October 11, 2002). More recently, a study of learning communities and the student engagement activities of first-year and senior students at 365 four-year institutions found members of fraternities and sororities to be among those most likely to participate in a learning community (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

For the purposes of this study, fraternity/sorority housing was defined as a closed living environment (usually a house or residence hall) occupied exclusively by members in the same organization. Typically, such housing is in the form of a fraternity or sorority house on campus or in the surrounding community. These residences are open only to members of the particular organization and their guests.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which members living in fraternity/sorority housing experienced learning outcomes associated with living in a learning community. Additionally, the study explored whether learning outcomes achieved were different for men living in fraternity housing versus women living in sorority housing.

Research Questions

Specifically, the study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do fraternity/sorority members feel actively engaged, learn, feel a sense of community, and feel their identity has been shaped by their living community as measured by the Learning Communities Assessment (LCA)?
2. Are there differences in the extent to which fraternity men and sorority women feel actively engaged, learn, feel a sense of community, and feel their identity has been shaped by their living community as measured by the LCA?

For purposes of this study, the word "house" refers to a specific place of residence or dwelling. The word "chapter" refers to the organization as in "chapter activities."

Methods

Sample Selection

The population of interest for this study was all undergraduate fraternity and sorority members at a major research institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Stratified cluster sampling was used with qualifying criteria to select individuals within selected clusters for participation in the study.

Selecting the sample was a two-step process involving, first, the selection of fraternity and sorority living facilities and, second, the selection of members living in the facilities. The institution where this research was conducted is host to 13 sororities (12 on-campus, one off-campus) and 32 fraternities (six on-campus, 23 off-campus, and three without housing). Fraternities and sororities without houses and the single off-campus sorority were not considered for participation in the study.

A minimum of 10 residents per living facility was established as a minimum occupancy to ensure that a comparable community dynamic existed between smaller off-campus houses and larger on-campus houses (Hirt, personal communication, June 10, 2002). From among living facilities meeting the criterion, four on-campus fraternity houses, four on-campus sorority houses, and 10 off-campus fraternity houses were selected at random for participation. On-campus fraternity/sorority housing provided 36 or 32 beds per facility depending on the year the building was constructed. The fraternity houses off-campus had fewer residents residing at the facility, most with ten or fewer members.

Once fraternity/sorority living facilities were selected, individual participants were identified based on specific criteria. Participants in each cluster sample had to hold active member status, as described by the organization (e.g., be in good standing by attending meetings, paying dues on time, and completing assigned tasks); had to be living in the house at the time of the study; and had to have lived in the house for a minimum of one semester.

If the fraternity/sorority living facility had the minimum number of qualified residents, an invitation to participate in the study was made through the organization's president. Participating organizations were eligible to win a \$100.00 prize as an incentive. If an organization's president agreed, a specific time to survey all residents living in the organization's housing facility was scheduled at an appropriate location. If an organization declined to participate, the next randomized chapter was contacted until the minimum number of research participants per cluster category was reached. A total of 101 affiliated women from four on-campus sorority houses, 100 affiliated fraternity men from four on-campus fraternity houses, and 63 affiliated men from nine off-campus fraternity houses were surveyed for this research project. Thus, 264 participants met the selection criteria and returned useable data.

Instrumentation

A specially adapted version of the Learning Communities Assessment (LCA) (Turrentine, 2001) was used for the purposes of this study. The LCA instrument (Appendix A) had a total of 45 items in five content areas to which participants responded on a continuum ranging from 1 (*very descriptive of my experience*) to 10 (*very unlike my experience*). Items selected for the instrument were constructed based on a review of the literature and on the professional reflections of two panels of experts with personal experience working in learning communities. After the initial set of items was confirmed by the first panel, a second review by a panel of experts from other disciplines who had learning community experience made no significant changes to the instrument (Turrentine, personal communication, August 12, 2002).

The LCA was adapted for the purposes of the present study with permission from the author. Items were adapted to assess fraternity/sorority activities in language familiar to

fraternity/sorority members. For example, some items were altered to read “chapter activities” instead of “group activities.”

In the first section, respondents completed a set of demographic questions such as academic college, gender, length of membership in the organization, and whether they lived in an on-campus or off-campus fraternity/sorority housing facility. Data elicited from the first section were used to describe selected characteristics of study participants and to ensure that respondents met the study criteria.

The remaining items of the LCA were grouped into four scales assessing Active Engagement, Learning, Sense of Community, and Identity. The Active Engagement scale was designed to measure the ways in which participants felt actively engaged in their fraternal community. Included in the scale were items such as, “I discussed my chapter activities with others” and “I worked harder on my chapter activities than on other activities.”

The 16-item Learning scale assessed the ways participants reported learning within their communities. Items in the Learning scale included statements such as, “I improved my assertiveness skills,” and “I improved my ability to work as a team member.”

The Sense of Community scale consisted of 12 items such as, “This experience felt like a community to me,” and “I got to know most of the people pretty well.” These items were designed to measure the degree to which participants felt a sense of community.

The Identity scale consisted of five items such as, “I see the world differently now than I did before,” and “This experience changed me.” These items were designed to assess the ways in which participants felt their community shaped their identity.

Reliability

The initial LCA reliability was determined by calculating the Coefficient Alpha internal consistency reliability of each of the sections of the instrument as well as the complete instrument using data collected from a recent orientation leader group (N=30). The instrument’s author reported an internal consistency reliability for the entire instrument of .99 (Turrentine, personal communication, August 12, 2002).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection consisted of five steps. First, the researchers arrived at each housing facility at the pre-scheduled time with instruments, pencils, resident list, the data collection protocol, and informed consent forms. Respondent eligibility was confirmed by ascertaining their gender, how long they had retained membership in their organization, if they lived in the fraternity/sorority house, and if they lived off-campus or on-campus.

Second, voluntary participation was solicited from each respondent and the purpose of the study was explained. Participants were told the study was an inquiry into fraternity/sorority housing and that if they felt any hesitation to begin or finish the instrument they could stop and leave at any time.

Third, participants were instructed to read each question carefully and rate their responses from 1 (*very descriptive of my experience*) to 10 (*very unlike my experience*) on the instrument provided. To simulate interval data for purposes of data analysis, respondents were asked to consider the 10 point scale as a continuum. Participants were instructed to use this continuum to best describe their responses to the LCA items.

Fourth, after reading the protocol (Appendix B) to participants, the instruments were distributed to residents of the living facility. Each resident was given an instrument, a copy of the protocol form, and a pencil if necessary.

Fifth, researchers remained present in the room to answer questions until all instruments were returned. Finally, the organization's president was thanked for agreeing to participate in the research, and reminded that the chapter was entered in the drawing for \$100.00.

Completed instruments were sorted by house and gender and stored in a secure location until data were analyzed. After all houses were surveyed, the winning house name was drawn from a container, and the chapter president received a check for \$100.00. A congratulatory e-mail was sent to the winning chapter with a courtesy copy to all other participating fraternities and sororities.

Data Analysis Procedures

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the data analysis. Mean scores and standard deviations were determined for all items for men (Fraternity), women (Sorority), and the total respondent group (Total). T-tests of the difference between means between independent groups were conducted to determine if the differences between fraternity and sorority mean scores were significantly different. Significance was set at the .05 level.

Results

Reliability

The LCA internal consistency reliability (using SPSS, N=264) for each of the scales of the instrument as well as the complete instrument were computed using the data collected from this study. The internal consistency reliability for the entire instrument was .98. The results of this calculation remain consistent with previous testing (.99).

Results

Demographic data collected for descriptive purposes included college, gender, duration of membership within the organization, if the respondent lived in the house, and whether the respondent lived on or off campus (Table 1).

Table 1
Characteristics of the Respondent Group

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
College		
Business	71	27
Arts & Sciences	51	19
Engineering	42	16
Human Resource & Education	42	16
Agriculture & Life Sciences	32	12
University Studies	10	4
Architecture & Urban Studies	9	3
Natural Resources	6	2
Graduate Studies	0	0
Veterinary Medicine	0	0
Gender		
Male	163	62
Female	101	38
Duration of Membership in Organization		
2 or 3 semesters	92	35
4 or 5 semesters	115	44
6 or more semesters	57	22
Live in the fraternity/sorority house		
Live in the house	264	100
Location of house		
On-campus	201	76
Off-campus	63	24

Note. Some percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

The first research question asked to what extent fraternity/sorority students felt actively engaged, learning, felt a sense of community, and felt their identity was shaped by their living community as measured by the LCA. The second research question asked if there were differences in these experiences between fraternity and sorority members. Means and standard deviations for all questions were calculated (Table 2). Participants were asked to respond to each question on a continuum ranging from 1 (very descriptive of my experience) to 10 (very unlike my experience). While participants marked the full range of responses 1 to 10, mean responses were between 5.93 and 2.23. Overall, mean responses tended toward the lower and more positive side of the continuum (descriptive of my experience).

Table 2
Item Mean Scores and Standard Deviations

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t-values</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
<i>Active Engagement</i>					
I think about my chapter activities even on my own time.					
Fraternity	2.83	2.48	0.61	259	0.55
Sorority	2.65	2.33			
Total	2.76	2.42			
I discussed my chapter activities with others.					
Fraternity	3.23	2.56	0.62	259	0.53
Sorority	3.02	2.70			
Total	3.15	2.61			
I worked harder on my chapter activities than on other activities.					
Fraternity	3.93	2.48	0.33	259	0.75
Sorority	3.82	2.77			
Total	3.89	2.59			
I felt like my chapter activities belonged to me.					
Fraternity	3.38	2.47	0.48	259	0.63
Sorority	3.23	2.42			
Total	3.33	2.44			
I did my very best on my chapter activities.					
Fraternity	2.91	2.23	0.16	259	0.87
Sorority	2.87	2.19			
Total	2.90	2.21			
I cared about the outcome of my chapter activities.					
Fraternity	2.56	2.31	0.17	259	0.87
Sorority	2.51	2.40			
Total	2.54	2.34			
My chapter activities engaged my interest & imagination.					
Fraternity	2.86	2.31	0.02	259	0.99
Sorority	2.86	2.38			
Total	2.86	2.33			
My chapter activities were intense.					
Fraternity	3.18	2.51	-0.66	256	0.51
Sorority	3.39	2.49			
Total	3.26	2.50			
<i>Learning</i>					
I learned some basic information that was useful.					
Fraternity	3.25	2.36	-0.72	262	0.47
Sorority	3.47	2.34			
Total	3.33	2.35			
I learned to think in practical ways about things I already knew.					
Fraternity	3.57	2.41	-1.08	262	0.28
Sorority	3.90	2.41			
Total	3.70	2.41			
I learned to use what I already knew in practical ways.					
Fraternity	3.47	2.20	-0.78	262	0.44
Sorority	3.69	2.29			
Total	3.56	2.23			

Table 2 (continued)
Item Mean Scores and Standard Deviations

Item		Mean*	SD	t-values	df	p
I improved my writing skills.	Fraternity	5.53	2.84	-2.90	262	0.00
	Sorority	6.57	2.83			
	Total	5.93	2.87			
I learned to think critically.	Fraternity	3.82	2.35	-4.97	262	0.00
	Sorority	5.41	2.77			
	Total	4.43	2.63			
I improved my time management.	Fraternity	3.20	2.44	-1.76	261	0.08
	Sorority	3.79	2.93			
	Total	3.43	2.65			
I improved my assertiveness skills.	Fraternity	2.97	2.20	-1.52	262	0.13
	Sorority	3.41	2.37			
	Total	3.14	2.27			
I improved my ability to work as a team member.	Fraternity	2.71	2.12	-1.21	262	0.23
	Sorority	3.05	2.33			
	Total	2.84	2.20			
I improved my ability to lead a team.	Fraternity	2.92	2.26	-1.02	261	0.31
	Sorority	3.23	2.59			
	Total	3.04	2.39			
I improved my ability to speak to a small group.	Fraternity	2.98	2.35	-0.81	262	0.42
	Sorority	3.23	2.62			
	Total	3.07	2.45			
I improved my ability to speak in public.	Fraternity	3.15	2.35	-1.33	262	0.18
	Sorority	3.57	2.81			
	Total	3.31	2.53			
I improved my ability to make a formal presentation.	Fraternity	3.77	2.45	-1.14	262	0.26
	Sorority	4.14	2.79			
	Total	3.91	2.59			
I improved my ability to plan events.	Fraternity	3.10	2.09	-1.22	262	0.22
	Sorority	3.47	2.77			
	Total	3.24	2.37			
I improved my ability to solve problems.	Fraternity	3.28	2.14	-1.68	262	0.09
	Sorority	3.78	2.64			
	Total	3.47	2.36			

Table 2 (continued)
Item Mean Scores and Standard Deviations

Item	Mean*	SD	<i>t-values</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
I improved my ability to work with people who are very different from me.					
Fraternity	3.12	2.34	0.98	262	0.33
Sorority	2.83	2.24			
Total	3.01	2.30			
I learned about the ethical treatment of others.					
Fraternity	3.71	2.53	0.22	262	0.83
Sorority	3.64	2.40			
Total	3.69	2.47			
<i>Sense of Community</i>					
This fraternity/sorority experience felt like a community to me.					
Fraternity	2.50	2.17	-0.39	260	0.70
Sorority	2.61	2.66			
Total	2.54	2.37			
I got to know most of the people pretty well.					
Fraternity	2.19	2.18	-1.81	262	0.07
Sorority	2.71	2.43			
Total	2.39	2.29			
Everyone knew who belonged to our fraternity/sorority.					
Fraternity	2.53	2.23	-2.08	262	0.04
Sorority	3.17	2.69			
Total	2.78	2.43			
We talked about ourselves in terms of this fraternity/sorority.					
Fraternity	2.70	2.25	-0.68	259	0.50
Sorority	2.90	2.36			
Total	2.78	2.29			
We developed our own ways of doing things.					
Fraternity	2.85	2.02	-2.12	259	0.04
Sorority	3.43	2.35			
Total	3.07	2.16			
We developed inside jokes, shared stories, etc.					
Fraternity	2.22	2.08	-0.09	260	0.93
Sorority	2.24	2.32			
Total	2.23	2.17			
We developed our own way of speaking to one another.					
Fraternity	2.89	2.30	-1.28	260	0.20
Sorority	3.29	2.71			
Total	3.04	2.47			
When we were apart for a while it didn't take us long to get going again.					
Fraternity	2.57	2.10	0.30	260	0.77
Sorority	2.49	2.39			
Total	2.54	2.21			

Table 2 (continued)
Item Mean Scores and Standard Deviations

Item	Mean*	SD	t-values	df	p
As a group, we pretty well know what will work.					
Fraternity	2.72	1.95	-0.48	260	0.63
Sorority	2.85	2.30			
Total	2.77	2.09			
I know everyone else's strengths and weaknesses.					
Fraternity	3.06	2.12	-1.81	260	0.07
Sorority	3.56	2.30			
Total	3.25	2.20			
I can identify things that remind me of this experience.					
Fraternity	2.99	2.40	0.84	259	0.40
Sorority	2.74	2.21			
Total	2.89	2.33			
We look at the world a little differently than other people.					
Fraternity	3.30	2.25	-1.46	259	0.15
Sorority	3.74	2.47			
Total	3.47	2.34			
<i>Sense of Identity</i>					
I see strengths and weaknesses in myself now that I didn't know I had.					
Fraternity	2.95	2.05	0.42	258	0.68
Sorority	2.84	2.27			
Total	2.91	2.13			
This experience caused me to examine my values.					
Fraternity	3.61	2.41	-0.06	256	0.95
Sorority	3.63	2.83			
Total	3.62	2.57			
I relate to people differently now than I did before.					
Fraternity	3.40	2.13	-0.93	258	0.35
Sorority	3.68	2.56			
Total	3.51	2.30			
I see the world differently now than I did before.					
Fraternity	3.68	2.22	-1.31	258	0.19
Sorority	4.08	2.60			
Total	3.83	2.37			
This fraternity/sorority experience changed me.					
Fraternity	2.82	2.33	0.99	257	0.33
Sorority	2.53	2.33			
Total	2.71	2.33			

* 1 = very descriptive of my experience and 10 = very unlike my experience

These statistics paint a picture of the extent to which affiliated students felt actively engaged, learning, felt a sense of community, and felt their identity was shaped by their living community as measured by the LCA.

Active engagement. Four of the eight items assessing Active Engagement had mean scores below a 3.0, and three out of the remaining four were at or below 3.33, suggesting that many fraternity/sorority members felt these statements were descriptive of their experiences. These results could be compared to literature on retention that suggests fraternity/sorority members feel a greater sense of involvement within their collegiate experience than non-affiliated students and that this connection keeps them in school (Tripp, 1997). Participants in this study agreed that they were actively engaged in their chapters. When t-tests were conducted on the items pertaining to active engagement, no significant differences between fraternity and sorority members were found.

Learning. Two of 16 items assessing Learning had a mean score above 4.0 (the highest mean scores of all the LCA items), and only one of the remaining 14 items fell below a 3.0, suggesting that students saw these statements as less descriptive of their fraternity/sorority living experience. However, fraternity members were much more likely to indicate that they learned how to improve their writing skills and think critically because of their affiliation with the group than were their female counterparts.

These findings mirrored much of the literature on fraternities and sororities and academic achievement that tends to suggest negative effects for affiliated students compared to their non-affiliated peers (Pascarella et al., 1996; Pike & Askew, 1990; Terenzini et al., 1996). Fraternity and sorority members in this study did not generally describe their living units as places where learning was likely to occur.

Sense of Community. Eight of the 12 items assessing Sense of Community had mean scores of less than 3.0, suggesting that these fraternity and sorority members found the LCA statements were very descriptive of their living experiences. The findings suggested that for these students, their sense of community was the most positive effect the fraternity/sorority living experience had on them as measured by the LCA.

Two of the 12 t-tests revealed significant differences at the .05 level. Fraternity men were more likely to indicate that the statement “Everyone knew who belonged to our group” and “We developed our own ways of doing things” were more representative of their living environment than among the living environment of sorority women.

Sense of Identity. Results were mixed for items assessing Sense of Identity. Two of the five items had mean scores below 3.0, but the remaining three had mean scores of 3.5 or higher. Fraternity and sorority members appeared to find some of the LCA statements were very descriptive of their experiences and others were only somewhat descriptive. These results might also suggest that questions in this section could be less connected to each other than those in other sections of the instrument. There were no significant differences between fraternity and sorority respondents.

Discussion

Overall, mean item scores for fraternity/sorority members on active engagement, sense of identity, and sense of community items were relatively close to 1 (*very descriptive*) suggesting that many members found statements assessing the three areas were at least somewhat descriptive of their living experiences. Items assessing learning in the fraternity/sorority living communities tended to have a higher mean score compared to other sections. These findings reflect the literature, which suggests that affiliated members as a whole experience little academic benefit through their participation in

fraternities and sororities (Pike & Askew, 1990). Additionally, lower mean scores on active engagement, sense of identity, and sense of community items may reflect the benefits of involvement (Parker & Gade, 1981) and retention (Tripp, 1997) found in fraternities and sororities.

The literature on learning and academic success suggests that fraternity men fall behind their female and non-affiliated (regardless of gender) peers in many academic areas (Pike & Askew, 1990). Additionally, practical experience among staff members of the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at the institution in this study suggests that fraternity men regularly achieve lower academic success (as measured by GPA) than their female counterparts (Wooldridge, personal communication, February 17, 2003).

Given the above, one might have expected to see significant differences between men and women on the LCA learning items, with women living in sorority housing more likely to rate LCA statements as more descriptive of their living experience than men living in fraternity housing did. However, only 2 of 16 LCA items assessing learning and 2 of 12 LCA items assessing sense of community were found to be significantly different, with men living in fraternity housing more likely to rate these statements as very descriptive of their experiences than women living in sorority housing. The significant differences on the learning items were surprising. Based on previous literature and practical experience, one would expect sorority women to rate the learning items as more descriptive of their living experience than men on most of the LCA items. In this study, fraternity men were more likely than sorority women to report that they learned from their housing community living experience.

While firm conclusions cannot be drawn from these data, one possible explanation for the inconsistency between results and the literature may be due to sampling methodology. Current literature (Pike & Askew, 1990) and practical experience of campus professionals where the study was completed (Wooldridge, personal communication, February 17, 2003) suggested that new fraternity members suffered the most academic distress upon joining their organizations. The limitation on length of time lived in the house as well as length of time as a member of the organization (Table 2) systematically eliminated more recently affiliated members, potentially increasing the magnitude of responses to items assessing learning as a consequence of the living environment.

Limitations

As with all research, this study had limitations. Respondents may not have been candid with their responses or not have taken the survey seriously. Researcher observations indicated that some men living in off-campus fraternity houses were not respectful of the process. Perhaps future researchers could find a different way to control some of the biases self-reporting may have had on the results of this study.

The LCA instrument was relatively new and has yet to be subjected to rigorous psychometric testing. It was also adapted to fit the living experiences of residents in fraternity/sorority houses. While the instrument reliability was affirmed in this study, validity studies should be conducted to ensure that the LCA truly measures the constructs the author claims it addresses.

Despite shortcomings, this study adds to the knowledge about fraternity/sorority living communities and their potential to be learning communities. More research on fraternity/sorority housing as learning communities needs to be completed, and college administrators should encourage

fraternity/sorority leaders to be more intentional about supporting actions that promote a stronger sense of community in fraternity/sorority living units.

Future Research

In this study, affiliated students were asked to reflect on their experiences as residents of their fraternity/sorority houses and as members of their organization. This dual request may have presented some students with conflicting feelings or unnecessarily complicated their responses to the instrument. Future researchers might ask only about students' residential experiences or organization membership. Perhaps a control group of non-residents could be used to consider how these seemingly different roles of member and resident affected fraternity/sorority students' collegiate experiences.

For this study, duration of membership in the organization as well as length of residency in the fraternity/sorority houses was carefully controlled to establish a minimum influence of the house and organization on the student. The selection criteria, however, may have skewed the results since participants were older, more experienced members. Future researchers may use this instrument to study new members of organizations and recent residents of living units to broaden an understanding of the fraternity/sorority experience.

Finally, this study represented a single snapshot in time of the perceptions fraternity/sorority members have of their membership and living unit experiences. Future researchers could take a longitudinal approach and measure students at the beginning of their experience, at a mid-point, and then after graduation. These additional data could provide more depth and perspective to the results.

Implications for Practice

Fraternity and sorority members in this study did not generally describe their living communities as places where learning occurred. Campus fraternity/sorority professionals at the institution at which this study was conducted, as well as other professionals, should consider the role fraternities and sororities play in re-enforcing the learning objectives and climate of the institution. The present results could be indicative of how far many organizations have drifted from their founding principles as scholarly organizations.

Conclusion

Do members living in fraternity/sorority housing experience learning outcomes associated with living in a learning community? More specifically, do fraternity/sorority members experience active engagement, learning, feel a sense of community, and feel their community has shaped their identity? The present study suggests that members feel actively engaged by their community. They feel a sense of community and feel that their community has shaped their identity. However, fraternity and sorority respondents in this study did not necessarily self-report that they were learning within their community as measured by items on the LCA. While fraternity/sorority housing units do comprise living communities on the campus in question, the housing units do not appear to be both living and *learning* communities.

References

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