AN ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMING SPONSORED BY MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS OF THE NATIONAL PANHELLENIC CONFERENCE

Genevieve Evans Taylor

Leadership development is a high priority for many National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities (National Panhellenic Conference, 1999) and obtaining leadership skills is a major reason why women join sororities (NPC/NIC Research Initiative, 2002). However, little research is available which summarizes leadership programs sponsored by NPC headquarters and the specific contents and effectiveness of such programs. This study examined those aspects through surveys distributed to the 26 NPC sorority headquarters. The results from the study demonstrate sorority headquarters indeed offer leadership education to undergraduate collegiate members through a wide range of programming; however, these programs may be missing critical elements associated with women's leadership theory. Recommendations for sorority professionals, including campus professionals and inter/national sorority leaders, are included.

Leadership development is a predominant focus within sororities. National Panhellenic Conference- (NPC) affiliated sororities offer a wide range of leadership programs for undergraduate women including leadership institutes, inter/national conferences and conventions, regional meetings, workshops and trainings, mandated programs, optional programs, and traveling consultant presentations. To symbolize the importance of leadership within sororities, the NPC shield includes a lamp, which denotes leadership, scholarship and enlightenment (NPC, 1999).

Many sorority public documents note leadership as an important aspect of sorority life. As stated in the NPC's *Manual of Information*, one of the reasons sororities exist is to "develop the individual's potential through leadership opportunities and group effort" (1999, p. 4). In addition, 20 of the 26 sororities note the term "leadership" on the main homepage of their Web sites, indicating its importance; and 16 of the 26 sororities note the term "leadership" within their creed, mission, vision, or purpose statement. Leadership is also a major reason why women join sororities. Through a study conducted by the Center for Advanced Social Research, 82% of NPC sorority members indicated they joined a sorority because of the opportunities for leadership training (NPC/NIC Research Initiative, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to provide an overview and critical evaluation of NPC sororities' programming efforts. Specifically, the research questions involved determining what leadership programs were offered, what expectations sorority leadership had for program learning outcomes, their perceptions of how effective programming was in achieving stated objectives, and the extent to which programs addressed specific needs of women's leadership development.

Drawing from a sample of NPC headquarters respondents (n = 28; 18 of 26 NPC groups), the researcher sought to first determine the types of programs being offered and then evaluated programmatic foci through a framework of reviewed literature on women's leadership development. A review of literature, shared in the next section, revealed several frames for

evaluation including empowerment, experiential learning, finding voice, listening, relationship building, self-confidence, information sharing, vision, and the sororities' founding values.

The researcher also asked participants to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of each key leadership component in their leadership programming and differentiated perceptions by demographics related to position within the organizations (i.e., inter/national president, executive director, or individual responsible for the collegiate leadership programming) and length of service.

Review of Literature

Many leadership studies can be grouped into four thematic areas: trait theory, behavior theory, situational or contingency theory, and values-based transformational theory. Trait theories examine the great leaders and the psychological, personality, physical, and social traits they exhibit (Bass, 1990; Chemers, 1995; Wiggam, 1931). Behavior theories focus on the actual action of a leader. Theories in this category go beyond looking at the internal characteristics of the leader and examine what leaders actually do (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995a; McGregor, 2001; Ouchi, 2001). Situational or contingency leadership theory goes beyond the traits of leaders and their behavior and includes the environment in which leadership needs to be displayed. This category of leadership theory notes how a leader will act in certain situations and suggests the environment affects how leaders display leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995b; Nye, 2008). The most recent additions to leadership theory include those that focus on the values of the individuals and the organizations, particularly among college students. These theories go beyond the traits, behavior, and situation. These theories indicate there is a relationship between the leader and the follower and examine leadership through a holistic approach (Burns, 1995; Fairholm, 1991; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007). These also are more inclusive theories based on samples including women and people of color (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). As a result, the past few decades have resulted in an increase of research in the area of women's leadership development and in the creation of leadership programs specifically for women. Danowitz, Sagaria, & Johnsrud (1988) found "the most helpful programs for developing women's leadership seem to be those intended primarily or exclusively for women… [because they] focus on supporting and affirming women's identity, aspirations, and accomplishments" (p. 9).

A review that included both the aforementioned general leadership research and women's leadership research resulted in a number of common components. Developing and maintaining relationships was a frequent theme, especially in values-based theory. Sharing information, listening, and empowerment were also prominent. Additionally, the cultivating of a values set was consistently found. Table 1 includes a listing of these and other shared elements common to both general leadership and women's leadership research.

Table 1
Leadership Components and their General and/or Women's Leadership Theorists

Leadership Component	General Leadership Theorists	Women's Leadership Theorists
Creating Experiential Learning		Astin & Leland (1991); Danowitz, Sagaria, & Johnsrud (1988); Micas (1991); Peters & Lutovsky (2001); Semersheim (1996); Whitt (1993)
Cultivating Values	Burns (1995); Ciulla (1995); M. Fairholm (2004); Gandhi (1995); Gardner (1990); Hesselbein (2002); Wheatley (1999)	McDade et al. (2008)
Defining Vision	M. Fairholm (2004); Greenleaf (1998); Hesselbein (2002); Kotter (1996); Kouzes & Posner (2003); Nye (2008)	
Developing and Maintaining Relationships	Burns (1995); G. Fairholm (1991); M. Fairholm (2004); Hesselbein (2002); Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy (1995); Komives, Lucas ,& McMahon (2007); Ouchi (2001); Vroom (1995); Wheatley (1999)	Astin & Leland (1991); Belenky et al. (1986); Danowitz, Sagaria, & Johnsrud (1988); Follett (2001); Gilligan (1993); Helgesen (1990); Komives (1991); McDade et al. (2008); Whitt (1993)
Developing Self-Confidence		Astin & Leland (1991); Danowitz, Sagaria, & Johnsrud (1988); Micas (1991)
Empowering	Komives, Lucas, & McMahon (2007)	Astin & Leland (1991); Danowitz, Sagaria, & Johnsrud (1988); McDade et al. (2008)
Finding Voice		Baxter Magolda (1992); Belenky et al.(1986); Gilligan (1993); Helgesen (1990); Micas (1991); Whitt (1993)
Listening	Covey (1990); G. Fairholm (1991); M. Fairholm (2004); Hesselbein (2002); Komives, Lucas, & McMahon (2007); Kouzes & Posner (2003); Wheatley (1999)	McDade et al. (2008)
Sharing Information	M. Fairholm (2004); Von Bertalanffy (1968); Wheatley (1999)	Danowitz, Sagaria, & Johnsrud (1988); Helgesen (1990); Rosner (1990)

The nine key leadership components are initially defined below:

- *Creating Experiential Learning* deals with giving individuals the opportunity to practice leadership skills that encourage independence.
- *Cultivating Values* deals with the core principles and beliefs that serve as the foundation for the sorority.
- *Defining Vision* includes the notion of embodying the core purpose and setting direction for decision-making.
- *Developing and Maintaining Relationships* involves intentionally creating opportunities for individuals to connect with one another in a personal and meaningful way.
- *Developing Self-Confidence* involves having a good sense and image of oneself.

- *Empowering* is the process of giving information and power to another individual for the purpose of enabling, teaching, and further enhancing the other's success.
- *Finding Voice* is the ability to discover and articulate internal beliefs.
- *Listening* involves the act of truly hearing and understanding what another individual is saying.
- *Sharing Information* is informing individuals that the act of sharing information leads to empowerment and allows for the individual/organization to maximize success.

These concepts are further described in the discussion section as they relate to specific survey responses. This allows analysis to be framed through the lens of extant research using language specifically emerging from the literature. The methods used to collect and evaluate data for analysis follow.

Method

This study examined the perceptions about leadership education of individuals working at or volunteering for a inter/national sorority headquarters. A researcher-developed survey, created based on leadership components detailed in the review of literature, was distributed to each of the 26 NPC sorority headquarters, with the request the individual responsible for leadership programming, the inter/national president, and the executive director complete the survey. A total of 28/78 surveys, or 36% were returned. The survey was structured in a Likert scale format, prompting participants to rate their organization's programming based on the emphasis, importance, and effectiveness of the program in addressing each of the nine leadership components.

Participants included 12/26 staff members responsible for leadership programming, 11/26 inter/national presidents, and 5/26 executive directors. Of the 26 total NPC groups, 18 (69%) sororities participated through at least one of their participants (inter/national president, executive director, or staff member) completing the survey. All respondents were female, and the average length of service in their current role was three years. The methods used to analyze data were based on the research questions and purposes of the study. SPSS was used as the statistical software to analyze the data. Mean, percentage, and standard deviation were calculated and reported.

Two primary limitations are acknowledged that affect generalizabiltiy. First, the response rate of this study ($n = 78$) was low; however, 18 of the 26, or 69%, of the NPC groups were represented. Great efforts were made to increase participation in this study. The struggles the researcher faced in data access further demonstrate the continuing challenges associated with the study of sororities. This consideration is discussed further in the recommendations. Secondly, the sample of this study was only drawn from NPC organizations. The author recognizes this as a limitation of the study, as sororities from the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations, Inc.; National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc.; National Multicultural Greek Council, Inc.; National APIA Panhellenic Association, Inc.; Native American sororities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sororities are not included. . This study introduces the opportunity for future study on how diverse sororities provide leadership education to members.

Results

All 18 participating sororities offered leadership programming through leadership institutes, inter/national conferences and conventions, workshops and trainings, mandated programs, optional programs, and traveling consultants. Of these groups, 88.9% offered leadership programming through regional meetings. Programming for leadership occurred most within leadership institutes and through traveling consultant presentations. Leadership institutes and regional meetings were perceived as more effective in achieving leadership outcomes. Table 2 summarizes mean and standard deviation for each leadership component based on perceived emphasis, importance, and effectiveness.

Table 2
Leadership Components and Composite Means (1-5 M scale[1])

	Emphasis	Importance	Effectiveness
Creating Experiential Learning	3.82 (.58)	3.94 (.72)	3.65 (.67)
Cultivating Values	4.42 (.77)	4.59 (.71)	4.03 (.85)
Defining Vision	4.04 (.71)	4.12 (.62)	3.81 (.70)
Developing and Maintaining Relationships	4.24 (.64)	4.31 (.65)	3.93 (.68)
Developing Self-Confidence	3.74 (.50)	3.80 (.60)	3.44 (.55)
Empowering	3.88 (.54)	4.20 (.61)	3.67 (.73)
Finding Voice	3.57 (.75)	3.60 (.71)	3.40 (.55)
Listening	3.45 (.75)	3.55 (.83)	3.26 (.74)
Sharing Information	3.95 (.95)	3.99 (.92)	3.58 (.92)

[1]1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = heavy

The most emphasized leadership components, based on headquarters staff perceptions, were cultivating values (*m* = 4.42), developing and maintaining relationships (*m* = 4.24), and defining vision (*m* = 4.04). Listening (*m* = 3.45) and finding voice (*m* = 3.57) were the bottom two components. Standard deviation measures demonstrated a moderate variability among responses: developing self-confidence (*sd* = .50), empowering (*sd* = .54), and creating experiential learning (*sd* = .58) were fairly consistent, while the most variable was sharing information (*sd* = .95).

The most important leadership components, based on headquarters staff perceptions, were cultivating values (*m* = 4.59), developing and maintaining relationships (*m* = 4.31), and empowering (*m* = 4.20). Listening (*m* = 3.55) and finding voice (*m* = 3.60) were the bottom two components. Standard deviation measures demonstrated a moderate variability among responses: developing self-confidence (*sd* = .60), empowering (*sd* = .61), and defining vision (*sd* = .62) were fairly consistent, while the most variable was sharing information (*sd* = .92).

The most effective leadership component, based on headquarters staff perceptions, was cultivating values (*m* = 4.03), which was the only component to average over 4. Listening (*m* = 3.26), finding voice (*m* = 3.40), and developing self-confidence (*m* = 3.44) were the bottom three components. Standard deviation measures demonstrated a higher variability among responses

than the other categories: developing self-confidence (*sd* = .55) and finding voice (*sd* = .55) were fairly consistent, while the most variable was sharing information (*sd* = .92).

Discussion

Sororities offer a wide range of programming which promotes members' leadership development. Sorority leaders consistently noted their programs emphasized cultivating organizational values and developing and maintaining relationships, which are critical aspects for women entering the work force and global community. While participants also listed other leadership components as important or effective, two were consistently missing from programming – developing self-confidence and finding voice, both individual leadership values. A discussion of these four components, related to the previously reviewed literature, follows. Each subheading is labeled according to whether it was "supported" or "not supported" by the findings of this research.

Cultivating Values (Supported)

This study found cultivating values was rated highest of the nine leadership components for emphasis, importance, and effectiveness. Cultivating values was identified as curriculum and/or programming geared toward strengthening the core principles and beliefs serving as the foundation for a sorority. Values-based leadership is consistently referenced in literature related to fraternity/sorority organizations, programs, communities, and professional associations. Theorists who support values-based, transformational leadership note the importance of leaders having a set of core values. Wheatley (1999) stated that values strengthen organizations, provide clarity, and serve as a guide when chaos occurs. Fairholm (2004) added that organizational and individual values dictate behavior.

This continued emphasis on values-based leadership would serve sorority members well as they enter the professional setting. Today's world is filled with complex issues, and values-based leaders are needed to navigate toward a peaceful, productive, and prosperous society. For sorority professionals, including campus professionals and inter/national sorority leaders, it is important to support values-based leadership education through intentional discussions with undergraduate sorority leaders. Campus professionals and inter/national leaders should work intentionally with sorority leaders on programming aimed at cultivating values, focusing efforts on how values assist in the organizational decision-making process. These discussions will further support the leadership development of students, and it will assist in holding sorority members accountable to their publicly stated values.

Developing and Maintaining Relationships (Supported)

The findings in this study showed relationship building was a high priority for leadership education within NPC sororities, as evidenced by this leadership component ranking second for emphasis, importance, and effectiveness. Developing and maintaining relationships was identified as curriculum and/or programming intentionally creating opportunities for individuals to connect with one another in a personal and meaningful way. As early as the 1920s, Follett (2001) asserted creating positive relationships is critical if one wishes to maintain a healthy and productive working organization. Similar to values-based leadership, relationship building will serve the women well as they enter today's complex society. In order to effectively lead, women

must know how to create, nurture, and maintain relationships to affect positive change (Komives et al., 2007).

Developing Self-Confidence (Not Supported)

Developing self-confidence was emphasized within the women's leadership literature, yet this current study notes this component consistently ranked seven or eight (of nine) in terms of emphasis, importance, and effectiveness. Developing self-confidence was identified as curriculum and/or programming intended to help women develop a good sense and image of self. To create and maintain healthy, productive, and empowering relationships, one must first have a high self-confidence level. In a frequently cited study, Astin and Leland (1991) found women who were successful leaders were aware of and felt good about their leadership talents and educational capabilities.

Developing self-confidence adds authenticity to leadership. Followers want to be led by leaders who feel good about themselves, who feel confident in their leadership, and who have a good sense of self. This promotes genuine and meaningful interactions. Since developing self-confidence is emphasized within the literature, it is recommended sororities place greater emphasis on this leadership component.

Finding Voice (Not Supported)

Finding voice was also emphasized within the women's leadership literature, yet this current study notes this component consistently ranked seven or eight (of nine) in terms of emphasis, importance, and effectiveness. Finding voice was identified as curriculum and/or programming strengthening the ability of women to discover and articulate internal beliefs. Helgesen (1990) noted being truthful to oneself was the key to finding one's voice. Baxter Magolda (1992) mirrored this assertion by stating, "voice is a mode of manifesting internal truth" (p. 230).

If sororities wish to strengthen their members' leadership development capabilities, finding voice must be further emphasized in sorority leadership programming. As organizations that place great emphasis on leadership, it is critical sorority women learn, implement, and promote self-reflection, an activity that helps facilitate by understanding and finding voice. Sorority professionals, including campus professionals and inter/national sorority leaders, may want to examine current programs aimed specifically at women's leadership development to determine if this component, seemingly missing from inter/national programming, might be included in campus-based programming.

Recommendations

Develop an Assessment Plan

Accountability and assessment are highly emphasized within the current educational environment, as evidenced by the 2006 Spellings Report regarding the future of higher education (US Department of Education). If sororities indicate leadership is a priority, they must be able to quantify and qualify it through research (Strayhorn & Colvin, 2006). In addition, if sororities wish to progress they must conduct assessments to determine if their programming is meeting the needs of their members and if the programming is meeting its intended objectives. Beyond internal research, sororities must also embrace research by external entities to ensure objectivity and gain credibility.

Unfortunately, as demonstrated by the low response rate for this study, gaining access to data on NPC-affiliated organization leadership programming is a challenge. Knowing research is highly restricted within this population, the author actively sought out allies within the NPC population for support of this research. In addition, the author contacted the NPC Research Committee Chair to gain approval for the study and was informed the survey did not need committee approval as it did not ask undergraduates for participation. This information was clearly communicated to the participants in the cover letter, yet some still noted it was against their organization's policy. Despite these efforts by the researcher, this study yielded a small response rate, thus showing the study of sororities for further understanding continues to be a challenge.

Make Assessment Data Available

Leadership is stated as a high priority for NPC sororities. Sororities display this priority through their organizations' Web sites, creeds, mission, vision, and purpose statements. If leadership development is truly a priority, programming efforts must go beyond these written statements. Sororities should record and publish statistics regarding the number of women who actually participate in leadership development programs. Many of the leadership programs are focused on specific officer positions rather than targeting the entire membership. Since 82% of the women who join sororities indicate they do so because of leadership opportunities (NPC/NIC Research Initiative, 2002), it is critical that sororities meet this need or they will quickly find themselves irrelevant.

Sororities could benefit from publicly available and easy to access assessment data that examines the effectiveness of the leadership programming. This information could be shared between the 26 NPC groups to see which groups are excelling at leadership programming, and then groups could share best practices. Ultimately, effective leadership programming is essential in preparing women to be active and contributing citizens of society. NPC groups have the potential to be a powerful and predominant force in the dissemination of leadership education to women if they choose to make it a priority, if they conduct and share assessment results, and if they share their effective programs with one another.

Expand Leadership Institutes

The respondents of this survey perceived leadership institutes as a primary way of effectively teaching leadership to sorority women. Based on this finding, sororities should continue delivering leadership education experiences to members by expanding institutes to include more participants. Leadership institutes can be very expensive to implement and only involve a small percentage of sorority women; however, sorority foundations could solicit donations to create an endowment for the expansion of leadership institutes. Further, campus-based partnerships with the administration, local chapter, or alumnae may be viable ways to financially support women's attendance to such institutes.

Include Campus Professionals

It is important that campus professionals be familiar with the leadership programs offered to sorority women. Through this knowledge, professionals can talk with sorority women about these leadership programs and encourage participation. In addition, if sororities provide campus professionals with assessment data noting the effectiveness of their leadership programs, these

same professionals can make strong arguments for campus financial support. Professionals can also take more advantage of traveling consultant visits. Consultants' traveling schedules are often set months in advance, thus allowing professionals the opportunity to contact the consultant prior to arrival. Consultants could lead a session on a leadership topic for an individual student organization, a joint fraternity/sorority educational program, or a presentation to the general student body. Consultants also could co-lead with a campus professional furthering the learning and collaboration of all involved.

Future Research

A survey with collegiate women could show if leadership programs are effective and meeting the objectives of the program. If sororities continue to place less emphasis on the components studied in women's leadership research, their members will be lacking the complete skills necessarily for effective leadership. A future study examining why these aspects are absent in leadership programming could prove to be beneficial to leadership educators.

Conclusion

Areas for growth include increasing access and participation in research by external entities, which will assist in gaining research credibility and will evaluate effectiveness of current programming. In addition, sororities must look for ways to increase the number of women who participate in their leadership programs. Finally, sororities need to examine current leadership programming to determine if they are including the key leadership components detailed in this study. Inclusion of these key leadership components will provide the collegiate women with a comprehensive leadership development experience, which will ultimately best prepare them for leadership roles after leaving campus.

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Author Autobiography

Dr. Genevieve Evans Taylor is executive director of Associated Students Inc. at California State University Channel Islands.