

# INTERACTIONAL DIVERSITY OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH INVOLVEMENT: FRATERNITY AND SORORITY STUDENT LEADERS' EXPERIENCES

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*This study examined the co-curricular experience of fraternity and sorority student leaders as it relates to their interactional diversity opportunities. Data were collected in the fall of 2008 from 75 students, representing four higher education institutions within the South-east. Using quantitative and qualitative analyses, the researcher discovered differences in the ways fraternity and sorority student leaders involved themselves beyond the classroom and how that involvement impacted their interactional diversity experiences with peers. Further analyses revealed how fraternity and sorority student leaders perceive diversity affecting their co-curricular collegiate experience.*

With the increasing number of minorities attending colleges and universities, diversity issues have become a more pressing concern for higher education institutions during the past years. As Taylor (2001) explained, "Since a primary goal of higher education is to create educated citizens, the demographic changes in the United States have spawned a reevaluation of [institutional] values and a growing emphasis on understanding the needs of diverse students" (p. 2). Researchers also have stressed the need for institutions to intentionally promote interactional diversity opportunities—defined as the chance for students to interact with others from diverse backgrounds—because college becomes the first time for many students to "encounter students with different perspectives, expand their own parochial views, and learn from peers with different cultures, values, and experiences" (Gurin, 1999b; Hurtado, 1999, p. 27).

College administrators can equip their students for lives in a pluralistic society after college by providing them with opportunities to interact with students of both similar and different backgrounds. Students' experiences in this diverse arena support them in gaining the

"skills and dispositions that are essential for living a productive, satisfying life after college in an increasingly multicultural world" (Umbach & Kuh, 2006, p. 170). This peer-to-peer contact can occur in a variety of ways on a college campus, including involvement and leadership in co-curricular organizations.

Social fraternity and sorority organizations foster an environment for their members to become involved within individual chapters and throughout the campus community. Much research has been conducted on the experience of being a fraternity- or sorority-affiliated student, in general; however, there is sparse literature on how specific subpopulations of these students, such as those holding leadership positions, are affected. Further, Hu and Kuh (2003) determined that there is not much literature on the contribution of beyond-the-classroom experiences to interactional diversity opportunities for college students. Specifically, further research is needed to understand how involvement in co-curricular and fraternity and sorority organizations foster or inhibit their members' opportunities to interact with diverse peers, and how these interactions, or lack thereof, influence the perceptions of the students involved.

The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the co-curricular experiences of fraternity and sorority student leaders?
2. Is there a difference in interactional diversity experiences of fraternity and sorority student leaders in terms of their institution type, gender, or level of leadership?
3. What is the perceived impact of fraternal and co-curricular experiences on interactional diversity opportunities?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although there has been no past research on interactional diversity experiences of students involved in co-curricular organizations such as fraternities and sororities, there is much literature, albeit dated, on the individual concepts of diversity, involvement, and fraternity and sorority membership. The Conceptual Model of the Impact of Diversity (Gurin, 1999b) and Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement help provide a framework and theoretical foundation for this study.

### *Conceptual Model of the Impact of Diversity & Benefits*

Gurin's (1999b) three-tiered model of structural, classroom, and informal interactional diversity can be used to best understand how institutions create opportunities for students to become aware of diversity and participate in experiences with diverse content and individuals. Structural diversity refers to the racial and ethnic composition of the student body composition, whereas classroom diversity is defined by the varied content taught and discussed by students and faculty. Although this model focuses on the racial and ethnic characteristics of diversity, for the purpose of this study the researcher defined structural diversity to include religious beliefs, philosophies of life, family backgrounds and interests, along

with racial and ethnic characteristics (Gurin).

Past research has shown that for further diversity experiences to occur on campus, the foundation must be structural. "Research ... shows that structural diversity improves opportunities for interaction, which in turn, has positive effects on learning and democracy outcomes" (Gurin, 1999a, ¶3). Additionally, by incorporating diversity in the classroom through course content and discussions, students are able to communicate with their peers on various topics, hear viewpoints that may be different from their own, and identify commonalities and shared experiences among their peers (Yeakley, 1998). Additional opportunities for students to interact informally with diverse individuals beyond the classroom can be found through participating in academic and social organizations, cultural events, and peer groups (Gurin, 1999b).

The importance of this type of interaction across diverse groups of the student body can be seen through the effects this type of engagement has on individual students. Hurtado et al. (2003) found student involvement with diversity promoted learning outcomes, which include active and more complex ways of thinking; intellectual engagement and motivation; a range of academic skills; and democratic outcomes such as perspective taking, acceptance of difference and conflict as normal aspects of social life, and commitment to civic and racial/cultural engagement. Further, Umbach and Kuh (2006) emphasize the importance of diversity interactions by noting:

As a result of experiencing diversity in college, students learn how to work effectively with others and how to participate actively and contribute to a democratic society. Moreover, through engaging with people from different backgrounds and with different life experiences, students are adding to the foundation of skills and dispositions that

is essential for living in a productive, satisfying life after college in an increasingly multicultural world. (p. 170)

Fraternal organizations have been criticized for their lack of effort to engage in diverse experiences. Laird (2005) found that particularly white fraternities and sororities on predominantly white campuses support homogeneity and depress interactions across difference through their chapter structures and activities.

### ***Involvement Theory & Its Benefits***

Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement defined involvement as "the amount of physical time and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). His theory posits that involvement is centered on a student's behavior, rather than the emotions or cognitive ability of the student (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Additionally, Astin (1977) provided an understanding for how students might benefit from their involvement in co-curricular organizations by the quantity and quality of their experiences.

Previous literature suggested students have significant and tangible benefits from involvement in co-curricular organizations. Researchers have found that students make significant gains in their cognitive and personal skill capacities including the ability to initiate responsibility, communicate, make decisions, establish and clarify perspectives and values, and manage peer influences and interpersonal relationships (Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994; Gellin, 2003; Huang & Chang, 2004; Hunt, & Rentz, 1994). Further, past research has indicated that these gains are further developed when students hold leadership positions within their organizations (Cooper et al., 1994). These developmental outcomes include: decision making, increased responsibility within a group (Kuh et al., 2000), inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way (Posner & Brodsky, 1995), developing purpose, civic responsibility

value development (Schuh & Lavery, 1983), dealing with diversity, values clarification (Sermensheim, 1996), community involvement, and citizenship (Eklund-Leen & Young, 1997). Furthermore, leadership roles have been shown to influence students' involvement in other campus organizations, as student leaders were more significantly more active on campus than non-leaders (Eklund-Leen & Young).

### ***Outcomes of Fraternity and Sorority Affiliation***

Previous studies have revealed both affirmative and challenging outcomes related to fraternity and sorority affiliation. Scholastically, affiliation appears to have conflicting affects on academic performance and dishonesty (McCabe & Bowers, 1996; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Misner & Wellner, 1970; Wilder, et al., 1986). Fraternity and sorority members show more persistence to graduation and a greater satisfaction with their collegiate experience compared to non-members (DeBard, Lake, & Binder, 2006). In regards to the relationship between members and alcohol, the research states that membership influences the intake of alcoholic beverages. In his review of literature, Andrew Mauk (2006), described the relationship as the following, "Greeks drink more often, in larger quantities, and suffer more negative consequences than their independent peers" (p. 245). Socially, involvement within fraternities and sororities has shown to have a widespread affect with members benefiting from developing interpersonal relationships and learning leadership skills; while, at the same time these students were also found to be less aware and concerned about social and moral injustices, less culturally sophisticated, and more dependent on family and peers (Wilder, et al., 1978; Winston & Saunders, 1987).

Ample research on the importance of co-curricular involvement and its benefits to college students is available; however, little exists on how fraternity and sorority student leaders

participate in co-curricular activities and the influence that has on their interactions with diverse peers. Fraternities and sororities afford their members with many additional involvement opportunities either within the organization alone or in conjunction with participation in other campus activities and/or organizations (Hunt & Rentz, 1994). Although these organizations promote involvement, past research on fraternity- and sorority-affiliated students has shown that members lack exposure to diversity due to the common homogenous composition of the individual chapters and the larger fraternal community (Pascarella, Kuh, & Wechsler, 1996). It is apparent there is a gap in the literature with regard to whether and how fraternity and sorority members gain experiences with diversity if their fraternal community is not affording them these opportunities. Therefore, this study sought to explore the diversity interactions of fraternity and sorority student leaders within their co-curricular involvement experiences.

## METHODOLOGY

This study followed a sequential explanatory mixed method design, using a survey and follow-up interviews (Creswell, 2003). A mixed methods descriptive design allows the researcher to compile more complete data that can be used to inform theory and practice (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). While the survey data assists the researcher in identifying the distribution of this population's experiences, the qualitative information allows for a greater understanding of this distribution (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993).

### *Research Sites*

This study was conducted at two large public and two small private institutions in South Carolina. The two public institutions and the two private institutions share similarities with regard to size and demographics. They were purposefully selected due to the variety of social fraternity

and sorority organizations and other co-curricular organizations available at these institutions, and the location proximity to the researcher. Tables 1 and 2 show institutional and student organization characteristics of the sample.

### *Instrumentation and Analysis*

The researcher developed the Co-curricular Involvement and Interactional Diversity Survey for this study by using the frameworks and themes from two existing surveys, College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) and The Greek Experience: A Survey of Fraternities and Sororities, and by researching previous literature. Specifically, the researcher used the "Student Acquaintances" section of the CSEQ and used Questions 56, 57, and 59 from The Greek Experience survey. The survey was piloted with a small group of sorority members from a private institution in Virginia to build construct validity and to ensure the logistics of the survey were easy to understand in order to produce non-biased answers to the questions.

Directors of fraternity and sorority life at each institution were initially contacted via e-mail and asked to assist in recruiting study participants by sending the contact lists of chapter presidents to the researcher. The approval of the University of South Carolina's Institutional Review Board was granted before any of the students were contacted. From the compiled list of chapter presidents provided by the institutions' directors, the researcher requested additional student contact information for other members with leadership positions. From a total of 131 contacts, the researcher randomly selected 25 from each institution and sent the invitation to participate in the study, as well as the survey link, by e-mail. The survey was available online for eight weeks, and reminder e-mails were sent out one time each week to encourage participation. The survey was completed and submitted by 75 of the 100 affiliated student leaders (Table 3). The researcher used SPSS software to analyze the quantitative data.

**TABLE 1**  
*Participating Institution Characteristics (Fall 2008)*

Institution	Undergraduate Enrollment	Gender Enrollment	Minority Enrollment
Clemson University	14,270	45% female	11%
University of South Carolina	18,827	55% female	18%
Newberry College	918	47% female	32%
Wofford College	1,389	48% female	13%

**TABLE 2**  
*Fraternity & Sorority Population & Co-curricular Organizations by Institution (Fall 2008)*

Institution	Historically White Fraternal Organizations	Historically Black Fraternal Organizations	% Fraternity and Sorority Members	Total Campus Organizations
Clemson University	38	9	20%	305
University of South Carolina	32	8	17%	300
Newberry College	8	2	31%	50
Wofford College	14	4	52%	84

After the quantitative research was completed, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with six students who had participated in the survey. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, each participant was questioned regarding his/her experiences with interactional diversity as it related to his/her involvement in co-curricular organizations. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed with the participants' permissions. The researcher used pattern coding to organize the qualitative data into themes to correspond to the research questions of this study.

**RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

Results showed that fraternity and sorority student leaders gained many interactional diversity experiences through multiple avenues of involvement within their fraternal community and co-curricular organizations. Although not extensively motivated to seek out these ex-

periences on their own, informal interactional diversity opportunities provided through organizations gave student leaders opportunities to explore not only their interests, but also their perceptions about themselves and diversity. Descriptive and narrative results evidencing these findings follow.

***Descriptive Results***

Descriptive statistics revealed that although fraternity and sorority student leaders were involved in other organizations on campus, the amount of participation they dedicated to this involvement was limited, confirming previous research (Asel, Pascarella, & Seifert, 2009). In particular, results showed an inverse relationship between the hours spent within each type of organization. In other words, as time commitments for their fraternity and sorority organizations increased, time to dedicate to other co-curricular organizations diminished (See Table 4).

**TABLE 3**  
*Survey Participant Demographics*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Sex ( <i>n</i> = 75)		
<i>Male</i>	28	37.3
<i>Female</i>	47	62.7
Race/Ethnicity ( <i>n</i> = 73)		
<i>African-American</i>	4	5.3
<i>Caucasian</i>	68	90.7
Institution Type ( <i>n</i> = 75)		
<i>Four-year private</i>	29	38.7
<i>Four-year public</i>	46	61.3
Year in college ( <i>n</i> = 75)		
<i>Freshman (1<sup>st</sup> year)</i>	4	5.3
<i>Sophomore (2<sup>nd</sup> year)</i>	20	26.7
<i>Junior (3<sup>rd</sup> year)</i>	19	25.3
<i>Senior (4+ years)</i>	32	42.7
Cumulative GPA ( <i>n</i> = 75)		
3.5-4.0	34	45.3
3.0-3.49	25	33.3
2.5-2.99	14	18.7
2.0-2.49	2	2.7
Organizational Affiliation ( <i>n</i> = 73)		
<i>National Panhellenic Council (NPC)</i>	39	52.0
<i>National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)</i>	14	18.7
<i>North American Interfraternity Council (NIC/IFC)</i>	19	25.3
Fraternity/Sorority Leadership Position ( <i>n</i> = 75)		
<i>President</i>	37	49.3
<i>Vice President</i>	9	12.0
<i>Treasurer</i>	5	6.7
<i>Secretary</i>	5	6.7
<i>Chair, Co-chair, Committee Head</i>	7	9.3
<i>Other Leadership Position</i>	12	16.0

**TABLE 4***Hours per Week Spent on Fraternity/Sorority vs. Other Co-curricular Organizations by Role*

Leadership Role	Hours per Week %				
	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12+
President (n = 37)					
<i>Fraternity/Sorority</i>	0.0	10.8	21.6	23.4	43.2
<i>Co-curricular</i>	35.1	32.4	18.9	5.4	8.1
Vice President (n = 9)					
<i>Fraternity/Sorority</i>	0.0	55.6	33.3	0.0	11.1
<i>Co-curricular</i>	22.3	44.4	11.1	22.2	0.0
Treasurer (n = 5)					
<i>Fraternity/Sorority</i>	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Co-curricular</i>	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Secretary (n = 5)					
<i>Fraternity/Sorority</i>	0.0	80.0	20.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Co-curricular</i>	60.0	20.0	20.0	0.0	0.0
Chair, Co-chair, Committee Head (n = 7)					
<i>Fraternity/Sorority</i>	0.0	42.9	42.9	0.0	4.2
<i>Co-curricular</i>	28.6	28.6	14.4	14.4	0.0
Other Leadership Position (n = 12)					
<i>Fraternity/Sorority</i>	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Co-curricular</i>	41.7	16.7	33.4	8.3	0.0

Additionally, as shown in Table 5 the majority of these student leaders reported participating, or at the very least being exposed to, various types of co-curricular organizations on campus. Specifically, the fraternity/sorority student leaders mostly participated in community service/service learning groups (79.7%) and intramural/club sports organizations (62.5%), while they were least involved in organizations seeming to promote diversity such as International/language-interest groups (87.0%) and minority/ethnic groups (82.4%). The students discussed their investment in service and athletic-based organizations as being a large focus of their chapters. This result is consistent with Schuh and Laverty's (1983) finding

that student leaders have increased participation in service-oriented groups.

A further interesting finding was in regards to the extent of involvement. Although more than half of the respondents reported being involved in these organizations, their involvement remained limited to "attending a meeting and/or event" or "active involvement," meaning that these students seldom pursued leadership positions. Other than student government organizations, less than 10% of these student leaders reported having additional leadership positions within each of the other co-curricular organizations. This lack of involvement suggests that a lack of interactional diversity opportunities also could be found, as these organizations could in-

**TABLE 5**  
*Fraternity/Sorority Leader Participation in Other Co-curricular Organizations*

Organization Type/Focus	%			
	% Not Involved	Attended a Meeting	% Active Involvement	% Leader
Academic Major ( <i>n</i> =74)	36.5	24.3	24.3	6.8
Community/Service Learning ( <i>n</i> =74)	20.3	29.7	40.5	9.5
Honorary Societies ( <i>n</i> =75)	38.7	30.7	22.7	8.0
Intercollegiate Athletics ( <i>n</i> =70)	68.6	11.4	18.6	1.4
International/Language-Interest ( <i>n</i> =69)	87.0	4.3	8.7	0.0
Intramural/Club Sports ( <i>n</i> =72)	37.5	11.1	45.8	5.6
Media ( <i>n</i> =74)	85.1	12.2	2.7	0.0
Minority/Ethnic ( <i>n</i> =74)	82.4	4.1	5.4	8.1
Performing Arts ( <i>n</i> =74)	67.6	16.2	12.2	4.1
Political/Social Action ( <i>n</i> =73)	72.6	19.2	5.5	2.7
Pre-Professional Societies ( <i>n</i> =73)	65.8	16.4	15.1	2.7
Religious/Interfaith ( <i>n</i> =72)	61.4	14.7	19.4	4.2
Residence Hall Government ( <i>n</i> =73)	89.0	5.5	1.4	4.1
Student Government ( <i>n</i> =73)	71.2	6.8	9.6	12.3

clude a large amount of diverse peers. Further research needs to be conducted in order to investigate this finding.

Although the initial finding relates to Astin’s (1983) proposition that involvement can be “multidimensional,” meaning that students can be involved in a variety of ways within a collegiate setting, the prevalence of students holding leadership positions within organizations outside of their fraternal chapters was minimal. This second finding highlights an important aspect of Astin’s (1977) description of involvement—that fraternity and sorority members may lack some important benefits from their participation due to the lack of prolonged time spent within the co-curricular organizations.

With regard to institutional contexts, results showed that demographic characteristics of

the student leaders were related to the amount of interactional diversity experiences they had. Specifically, the students from the two private institutions had more interactional diversity opportunities than those at the public institutions. This could suggest that due to the nature of small, private colleges, the amount of students participating in multiple organizations could influence these opportunities. This could also suggest that students at public institutions spend less time seeking out these opportunities or are less involved, on average, than their private institution counterparts. Further, with regard to sex and year in college, females and first- and second-year students reported higher levels of interactional diversity opportunities than their older male peers.

Finally, the students’ leadership positions



**TABLE 6**

*Correlations for Leadership Position and Interactions with Diverse Peers within Fraternal Organizations*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Fraternity/sorority leadership role	—						
2. Interacted with students with different interests	-.066	—					
3. Interacted with students with different family backgrounds	.233*	.478**	—				
4. Interacted with students whose race/ethnicity is different from yours	.128	.435**	.461**	—			
5. Interacted with students from another country	.123	.228	.411**	.491**	—		
6. Interacted with students who have a different philosophy of life from you	.070	.378**	.440**	.377**	.401**	—	
7. Interacted with students whose religious beliefs were different from yours	.185	.360**	.411**	.239*	.358**	.604**	—

Note:  $n = 75$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

were positively correlated with the frequency of interactional diversity opportunities they gained through their fraternities and sororities (See Table 6). This was also the case for the relationship between the amount of time spent in co-curricular organizations and frequency of interactional diversity experiences (See Table 7). In summary, student leaders who were more involved in their fraternities and sororities than other co-curricular groups did not have fewer frequent interactional diversity experiences. This finding further supported Astin's (1983) Theory of Involvement positing that as students gain more developmental experiences, they invest more time and energy into their overall involvement.

Table 6 shows that 5 out of the 6 interactions were positively related, although weakly, to the level of leadership a student holds within a fra-

ternal organization. This suggests that opportunities to interact with diverse peers increased with greater leadership responsibilities. However, one type of interactional diversity opportunity, "interactions with students with different interests," was weakly and negatively correlated suggesting that the relationship is inverted,  $r_s(75) = -.066$ ,  $p > .05$ . Therefore, as the leadership level increased within a fraternal organization, the opportunities for these students to interact with students who have different interests from them decreased, suggesting that possibly these students did not have enough time to establish rapport with their peers due to the responsibilities of their leadership position.

In addition, several of the types of interactional diversity were significantly correlated with other forms of interactional diversity.

**TABLE 7**

*Correlations for Co-curricular Involvement Hours and Interactions with Diverse Peers within Co-curricular Organizations*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Co-curricular involvement hours	—						
2. Interacted with students with different interests	.268*	—					
3. Interacted with students with different family backgrounds	.227	.705**	—				
4. Interacted with students whose race/ethnicity is different from yours	.327**	.517**	.683**	—			
5. Interacted with students from another country	.319**	.309**	.307**	.576**	—		
6. Interacted with students who have a different philosophy of life from you	.289*	.480**	.585**	.630**	.464**	—	
7. Interacted with students whose religious beliefs were different from yours	.210	.517**	.549**	.514**	.523**	.756**	—

Note:  $n = 75$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

Specifically, strongly correlated forms of interactional diversity included: different religious beliefs and different philosophy of life,  $rs(75) = .604$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , students from another country and different races/ethnicities,  $rs(75) = .491$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and different family backgrounds and different interests,  $rs(75) = .478$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . These findings suggest that various forms of interactional diversity, as they pertain to fraternity and sorority chapters, are inter-related. For example, a racially diverse peer could also be someone from another country. Therefore diversity seems to be a complex issue in that one individual may be perceived by others to exhibit more than one diversity characteristic, and therefore, an interaction with one person may result in an interaction with a variety of

diversity characteristics.

As is shown in Table 7, the amount of time the participants reported spending within their co-curricular organizations was positively correlated to the types of interactional diversity opportunities within co-curricular organizations. In particular, involvement hours and the following types of interactional diversity opportunities had the most significant correlations: students with different races and ethnicities,  $rs(75) = .327$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , students from another country  $rs(75) = .319$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , students with different philosophies of life,  $rs(75) = .289$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , and students with different interests,  $rs(75) = .268$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . These findings further highlight the importance of time spent in regards to student involvement, as these students gained more frequent inter-

actional diversity opportunities as they invested more time. Further, Table 7 also reveals that all types of interactional diversity opportunities were significantly correlated to each other. This finding is similar to the finding from the fraternity and sorority organizations' interactional diversity opportunities, as various types of diversity were found to be related.

### *Student Perspectives*

Several factors contributed to quantity of interactional diversity opportunities: the size and structural diversity of the organization, formality, time commitment, and advisor influence within the groups. For example, several interviewees explained that size and the representation of multiple characteristics were very important to the overall amount of interactional diversity opportunities. Participants were hesitant to claim their fraternal and co-curricular organizations contained all characteristics of diversity, but all agreed that the structural composition of the group was contingent upon both the number of members, type of organization, and focus on recruiting diverse members. One participant noted his involvement with orientation was his most diverse experience because it allowed him the opportunity to interact with fellow leaders and incoming students. He described that group by saying, "It kind of seemed like everybody was represented." When articulating their fraternity and sorority chapter's structural diversity, the combination of large group sizes and variety of demographic characteristics represented within them signified for these students an example of an organization that was strongly diversified.

When discussing how interactional diversity opportunities were created within their chapters and other organizations, the participants articulated that the sense of community and informal time spent within organizations was essential. The consensus was that organizations such as academic honor societies and major interest groups limited the extent of interaction-

al diversity opportunities as they were too focused on content and did not allow consistent time for relaxed conversations. For example, one student leader stated, "I guess in my [public relations organization] meetings, which are like once a month, it is business casual. Like you come in, you listen to a speaker, and you leave." Further illustrating the value of unstructured time spent within an organization, several interviewees positively attributed their interactional diversity opportunities to the quantity of meetings and events that their fraternal organizations provided. One student described this perception by saying that he had known an international student who lived in his residence hall the previous year and only became good friends with him as a result of his fraternity's recruitment process. These findings support earlier research conducted by Gurin (1999a) linking structural diversity to informal interactional diversity experiences.

The concept of diversity was a complex and subjective term for participants. For most, race was an important component of diversity, but the concept was described more broadly to include difference. The types of diversity represented within this study were found to relate to one another both through correlation tests and the students' responses, suggesting that this concept is indeed a "melting pot" of many diverse characteristics coming together. Thus, as a student leader described interactional diversity experiences with another student of a different race, he/she tended to also describe other dimensions of diversity that were equally represented by the racially diverse peer.

Interviews also revealed that fraternity and sorority student leaders benefited from their interactions with diverse peers in ways that their interactions with similar peers cannot provide, signifying that there is a difference in the type of interaction that occurs between the individuals. One student leader explained his experience interacting with his homosexual fraternity roommate by saying, "That [being gay] was kind of forbidden territory growing up in the South.

You know people who are gay, you don't talk to them, don't associate with them. And I came here [to college] and I really didn't care either way ... I definitely understand that lifestyle more now." Another student leader reflected on her desire to become more open-minded to different ideas by being less "judgmental" and "not always being right." Further illustrating how these interactions can lead to positive benefits, one student stated: "I do believe that diverse peers are going to introduce you to things and give you some of their ideas that you didn't have. And for the most part, I do feel like they're going to define not you, but your values—help you define your values and help you define what you believe in." Although this study was not focused on racial diversity, this finding does relate somewhat to previous research that indicates diversity experiences lead to a multitude of developmental gains (Gurin, 1999b) including obtaining multiple perspectives that can influence students to reevaluate their own perspectives on the world and others (Gellin, 2003).

Student leaders discussed how their interactional diversity experiences were helping to prepare them for life and work in a pluralistic society (Umbach & Kuh, 2006) and learn to appreciate differences. One student described how she anticipates how her professional field will expect her to already have these experiences: "I want to work in international business, which means that I'm working with a lot of people who are extremely different from myself, and I need to have these experiences now." Further reflecting on the importance of diverse interactions, the student leaders spoke about how they embrace these opportunities now. One student leader explained how his experience has led him to realize that through accepting others, the opportunities for interaction are limitless. "By definition there are no boundaries, and by confining yourself to something by saying 'I'm this, I'm that,' you're really fooling yourself because you don't know who you are ever."

A final interesting contribution to these in-

teractional diversity opportunities came from the collegiate directors, national organizations, and chapter advisors of the groups. The student leaders interviewed shared how the knowledge and encouragement from advisory boards made an impact on changing the culture of the fraternity and sorority community to better embrace difference. In describing this experience in detail, one student commented how the intentionality of the fraternity and sorority office programming, officer retreats, and events brought the different groups together. Another student leader realized the importance of the advisor's influence because she acknowledged that "Greeks [sic] individually probably don't do as much as they could."

## CONSIDERATIONS

### *The Co-Curricular Experience*

Although past research has indicated that fraternity and sorority members are involved in co-curricular organizations outside of their chapters (Asel, Pascarella, & Seifert, 2009), this study revealed that their non-fraternal involvement is limited by the amount of time the students spend within these organizations. In particular, this study added new perspective on the co-curricular involvement tendencies of student leaders within fraternal organizations and other on-campus organizations. Participants reported an inverse relationship between the hours spent within each type of organization, meaning that as their time commitments for their chapters increased, their time to dedicate to other co-curricular organizations diminished. Further, using Astin's (1984) multidimensional involvement proposition, this study revealed that the majority of these student leaders reported participating, or at the very least being exposed to, various types of co-curricular organizations on campus.

As these students hold leadership positions within their fraternities and sororities, it makes sense that they would spend more time within

them. However, this could also mean that they do not believe they have enough time to be involved more in outside organizations. Further research is needed to clarify this finding. Regardless, fraternity and sorority advisors should encourage students to not merely be involved, but be engaged within an organization, through leadership positions or active participation during meetings and events, to fully experience the benefits of interpersonal development through membership.

### ***Interactional Diversity Opportunities***

Quantitative and qualitative data revealed that although diversity is traditionally defined through racial and gender terms, fraternity and sorority student leaders explained the term using broader examples. The types of diversity represented within this study related to one another, suggesting that this concept is indeed a “melting pot” of many diverse characteristics coming together. This finding could mean that although fraternity/sorority leaders consider race a component of diversity, it seems that they place a higher significance on broader diversity characteristics rather than maintaining a normative standard. Further research is needed to clarify this apparent generational shift of definitions and why these students interpret diversity in loose terms, rather than in physical characteristics.

Correlation results revealed that that many types of diverse peers were significantly related. This finding suggests that diversity characteristics are inter-related and that students interacting with racially diverse peers could also be interacting with individuals who have different religious beliefs as well. This is an important finding to note that as students reflect on their diversity experiences it is not necessarily quantity of diverse individuals that matters. Instead, it appears to be the quality of interaction among these students that lead to an understanding of difference.

Further, fraternity and sorority student

leaders articulated that increased involvement, through time or leadership position, within their fraternal and co-curricular organizations resulted in a greater frequency of interactional diversity experiences. Fraternal chapters afforded members more opportunities to interact with each type of diverse peer, with the exception of racially diverse individuals, than co-curricular organizations. Conversely, interactions with racially diverse peers were more frequent within co-curricular organizations. To explain this difference, the student leaders described how the structural composition, formality of the group, and their advisory boards were important factors. For example, interview participants discussed how academic and honor societies are too purpose-driven to focus on offering diversity interaction experiences. Thus the students felt that their interactional opportunities were limited. This supports earlier research by Gurin (1999a) that stated structural diversity impacts informal interactional diversity opportunities. Further highlighting Astin’s (1984) postulate that more involved students will have a higher quality experience; the participants described the frequency of meetings and unstructured time spent with their fraternal brothers and sisters as contributing to the availability of diverse interaction.

As evidenced from this study, interactional diversity opportunities should focus on the structural composition of the entities involved to ensure that student groups provide ample exposure to different perspectives. Students should be encouraged to seek out diverse opportunities to engage in discussions with peers, to be exposed to new perspectives, and to reflect on these experiences in and outside classroom settings.

### ***Impact of Interactional Diversity Experiences***

Reflecting on their experiences, the student leaders commented on how their abilities to understand others, be open to others’ perspec-

tives, and learn from their peers were positively affected by involvement. Although these findings are not specifically supported by the previous research, these findings do relate somewhat to Antonio's (1998) research that suggested cultural knowledge and understanding are increased through racial interaction; and Gurin's (1999b) finding that interactions with racially diverse peers leads to a multitude of developmental gains including perspective taking.

This study further illustrated Gellin's (2003) point that multiple opinions can influence student worldviews and cause students to reevaluate their own perspectives on the world and others. In addition to strengthening their own views, students also acknowledged the future importance of their dialogues. The majority of participants suggested that the ability to live and work in a pluralistic society is both expected from future employers and a desired personal attribute (Umbach & Kuh, 2006). As all participants articulated important gains from their interactional diversity experiences, fraternal and co-curricular organization administrators should continue to be intentional in providing these opportunities. This study showed that students interacted with diverse peers more often when they were informally involved in their student groups. Student groups should have more informal time set aside to support these interactions and connect the individuals. Further, all participants noted benefits from their experiences through some reflection. Administrators should influence both the interaction and the reflection of the interactional diversity experiences to support student development experiences.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The researcher broadly defined diversity as being inclusive of religion, family background,

philosophy of life, and interests, instead of limiting it to race and ethnicity. It is difficult to determine which type/s of diversity interaction that participants related to developmental outcomes. Further research is needed to understand how fraternity and sorority members identify and define diversity and to determine what affect, if any, their varied definitions have on their diversity awareness. Also, a study comparing the interactional diversity opportunities and co-curricular experiences of non-affiliated students with affiliated students could further clarify assumptions as to how these two groups differ from one another with regard to these two areas since this study only looked at the experience of one population of students.

Although the researcher used two public and two private institutions in South Carolina, generalizations should not be made for the co-curricular and interactional diversity experiences of fraternity and sorority student leaders. This study was intended to initiate future exploration into interactional diversity experiences of fraternity and sorority members. Further research encompassing students at colleges and universities across the United States could add additional information with regard to interactional diversity opportunities and co-curricular involvement experiences. Additionally, to fully understand the impact diversity has on college students, a study incorporating all three components of the Conceptual Model of the Impact of Diversity would be particularly helpful in determining their holistic experience of students within and beyond the classroom. Finally, as this study revealed differences with regard to student demographics, a deeper investigation of how student and institution characteristics influence the impact of diversity on college campuses and students would be particularly enlightening.

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