ALCOHOL, BROTHERHOOD, & LEADERSHIP, OH MY! NEGOTIATING THE INTRICACIES OF FRATERNITY AND SORORITY RESEARCH

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In this issue of Oracle, readers will find five articles that illustrate the complexity of outcomes and experiences associated with fraternity/sorority membership. Each year fraternities and sororities garner negative media attention for a host of inappropriate behaviors such as Black-face incidents at parties, student deaths connected to high risk alcohol consumption, reports of sexual harassment or assault, and others. These incidents have led journalists, educators, and other concerned stakeholders to question the continued presence of Greek-lettered organizations on college and university campuses. In contrast, many educators, namely those who work directly with fraternity and sorority members and leaders, can attest to the inspired stories of members who persist in college because of the sense of belonging their organizations offer, individuals who gain valuable leadership skills and experiences, or students who talk about the personal growth they've experienced through membership in a fraternity or sorority. Further, scholars have found positive relationships between membership and outcomes such as leadership development (e.g., Biddix, Matney, Norman, & Martin, 2014; Martin, Hevel, & Pascarella, 2012). Taken together, it becomes clear to those who work with fraternities and sororities to see that eliminating fraternity/sorority life from college campuses, an action suggested by many (e.g., Flanagan, 2014), is a simple response to a complex and nuanced issue, but not likely a viable solution. Each article in this issue tells a piece of the fraternity/sorority life story.

We begin this issue with Matthew Johnson, Erica Johnson, and John Dugan's article titled Developing Socially Responsible Leadership and Social Perspective-Taking in Fraternities and Sororities: Findings from a National Study. Their research extends our understanding of fraternities/sororities and socially responsible leadership by focusing on differences among various groupings and councils of fraternity/sorority members. This research further illustrates the difficulties Biddix et al. (2014) identified related to disaggregating data and exploring differences across governing councils in fraternity/sorority research. In White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol Use, Pietro Sasso explored the personal narratives of fraternity members and their use of alcohol. His research offers a disturbing, although perhaps not surprising, view of the ways in which alcohol is used by fraternity members to reinforce hegemonic masculine structures and ideals. Next, Gentry McCreary and Joshua Schutts present groundbreaking research on brotherhood in their article Toward a Broader Understanding of Fraternity-Developing and Validating a Measure of Fraternal Brotherhood. This important research seeks to make the often ethereal and abstract concept of brotherhood a measurable and definable construct. Taking an organizational approach, Tim Reuter and Steve Backer in their article Operationalizing Organizational Change Theory: Implications for Practice in the Fraternity/Sorority Movement, present a model for change grounded in the unique culture of fraternities and sororities. Finally, Michael Armstrong and Rick Grieve's article Big Five Personality Traits of Collegiate Social Fraternities and Sororities explores personality traits and political orientations of fraternity/sorority members compared to unaffiliated students. This study extends our understanding of the fraternity/sorority experience by focusing on personality theory, a less explored aspect of this unique campus subculture.

Taken together, the articles presented in this issue challenge educators who work with fraternity/sorority members to consider the ways in which these organizations may simultaneously benefit and

harm members and the campus communities in which they reside. The scholarship presented here calls educators to look beyond minimizing negative behaviors when they occur to consider the over-arching benefits that comprehensive and persistent organizational and cultural change can have on the positive experiences and outcomes for fraternity/sorority members and their extant communities.

References

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