PERCEPTIONS OF NEW MEMBER ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT: A MIXED METHODS CASE STUDY

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A mixed methods case study was conducted to triangulate a comprehensive assessment of the perceptions of fraternity/sorority life from three different stakeholders on a liberal arts campus. Three electronic surveys were sent to selected groups that asked respondents to provide perceptions of the academic engagement of affiliated students on the campus. In addition, affiliated student's grade point averages were monitored across three semesters to determine if there was a marked change in academic performance while going through the new member education process. Results showed that new member academic performance was similar across the semester prior to, during, and after the new member experience. Survey results showed differences in perception of affiliated students' academic engagement by group surveyed, and provided sources of common interest to promote greater understanding between stakeholder groups.

This article focuses on the academic engagement of new fraternity and sorority members at a small liberal arts institution sheltering local fraternities and sororities with recruitment deferred until the second semester of the freshman year. Grade Point Averages (GPAs) of affiliated students prior to joining an organization, during the semester they became members, and the semester immediately following their initiation were compared to determine change in achievement levels.

As an emerging student affairs professional, the first author was confronted by many faculty members who questioned the value of campus fraternities and sororities, and who maintained the organizations were contrary to the mission of the institution (Conroy, 2007). The present study was undertaken as a means of providing evidence that the campus fraternity / sorority experience was a value-added component to the institution's educational mission.

In his daily work, the first author encountered faculty members who questioned the very existence of the organizations. These faculty skeptics maintained that students who joined the organizations had a "dramatic decline" in GPA the semester after affiliation. On the other hand, the fraternity / sorority students with whom he worked said they received benefits from their membership that would last a lifetime. Many students in the fraternity/sorority community felt their time management skills were refined as a result of clearly defined schedules, thus resulting in an improvement in their academic performance. This observation is consistent with numerous studies that show co-curricular programs assist students in taking their theoretical knowledge and putting it into practice (Barger & Hall, 1965, Eurich, 1927, Iffert, 1958, Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1994, Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001, Reed, 1994, Scott, 1965, Sherron, 1970, Stannard & Bowers, 1970).

A policy of deferred recruitment was implemented by the campus administration in 1996. First semester students were prohibited from joining a fraternity or sorority, and only second semester students who obtained a 3.0 or above, submitted two faculty recommendation letters, and were involved in community service could petition to join a fraternity or sorority. While the university's Office of Community Service Learning reported annually that the fraternity/sorority community consistently performed more community service hours than all other clubs and organizations combined, there remained signifi-

cant doubt among the faculty as to whether these groups contributed meaningfully to campus life. Based on survey data collected for this study, faculty members at the university had particular concerns about the academic performance of new fraternity and sorority members.

At the time of this study ten local fraternal organizations (five fraternities and five sororities) were recognized on the campus. While each group had specific eras in their history where members strayed from their mission statements and core values, the qualitative data collected for this study suggested the groups had developed a renewed commitment towards academic achievement. The fraternity/sorority community's cumulative GPA rose steadily from 2000 to 2006. In fall 2006, the community's mean GPA had risen to a cumulative 3.15 (N = 315), up from a 2.71 in fall 2004 (N = 290).

Methods

The present mixed methods case study design (Yin, 2003) was intended to assess perceptions about the value of fraternity/sorority involvement toward the academic mission of a small Liberal Arts private university in the United States. Following IRB approval, the total population of the three campus constituencies of interest were emailed a locally-developed open-response survey in April - May 2006: (1) 194 full-time faculty members (including coaches who had faculty status), (2) 2,269 non-affiliated students, and (3) 323 fraternity and sorority members. Each constituency received a survey tailored to their group. Surveymonkey.com, an online assessment tool that assists individuals to design, collect, and analyze data via the World Wide Web, was used to collate responses. Respondents had 14 days in which to complete the on-line survey. After the first week, the survey was re-sent to non-respondents and they were given an additional week to complete the survey. In addition, a one-way ANOVA was performed on quantitative GPA data for all fraternity and sorority members across two years for a three-semester block: the semester prior to affiliation, the semester of affiliation, and the semester after affiliation.

Setting

The residential liberal arts campus on which this study was conducted was founded in 1907. The first fraternity on this campus was established in 1909, while the first sorority on this campus was established in 1910. At the time of this study, there were five local fraternities and five local sororities with a total membership of 323 students. Chapters ranged in size from eight to 52 members. Fraternity and sorority members represented 12.5% of all undergraduate students, almost all of whom ranged in age from 18 to 23. Close to 90% of all students resided in on-campus housing. All fraternity/sorority groups had on-campus housing supported by the Office of Residence Life and Housing. Each chapter enjoyed the support of a faculty member or an administrative staff member as a chapter advisor. Finally, fraternity and sorority sponsored activities provided a major social outlet for most undergraduate students on the campus.

Institutionally, faculty members were encouraged to engage students outside as well as inside the classroom. All first year and transfer students were required to enroll in a First-Year Seminar class. Students in these classes were often invited for dinner at faculty members' homes to build a lasting relationship and aid in retention. Faculty members were frequently asked to participate in residence hall discussions on various topics such as politics, civil rights issues, and other current events. The university has had a long history of academic engagement efforts for both students and faculty, closely paralleling the recent initiatives sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Hodge, Baxter, Magolda, & Hines, 2009).

Instrumentation

Three non-overlapping open-ended surveys were developed for purposes of the present

study, each individually tailored to the specific campus entity. While the non-overlapping surveys limited some direct comparisons between the respondent groups, there is evidence to suggest that an "implicit" response bias exists between students who join and do not join a fraternity / sorority (Wells & Corts, 2008), since "individuals favor groups they belong to in order to increase their self-esteem" (¶ 16).

Faculty Survey. Open-ended questions on the faculty member survey included 10 demographic questions such as sex, tenured status, years of teaching experience, years of teaching experience on the specific campus, if they advised a club or organization, and if they were affiliated with a fraternity or sorority as an undergraduate. Free response items included the degree to which the faculty members perceived fraternity/sorority members to be academically engaged in their classrooms, the degree to which they perceived the fraternity/sorority experience aided in leadership development, community service efforts, and interpersonal social development such as communication skills, people skills, and time management.

Non-Affiliated Student Survey. The non-affiliated student survey contained seven demographic items and 23 free response items focusing on non-affiliated students' perceptions of fraternity and sorority members' academic engagement in their undergraduate classes. Students were asked to compare the hours per week they spent studying and in social activities, and to provide an estimate of the hours per week they perceived fraternity/sorority members to study and spend in social activities. Students also were asked if they went through the recruitment process as a proxy measure of non-affiliated students' exposure to fraternity/sorority life.

Affiliated Student Survey. Fraternity and sorority members completed 15 demographic questions including ethnicity, class standing, major, their GPA prior to membership, during the new member education period, and after the new member education period, on or off-campus residence, number of hours worked per week, semesters of membership, and semester pledged (second semester freshman, first semester sophomore, and second semester sophomore). Free response items tailored specifically to affiliated students *a priori* perceptions by the first author included whether they felt discriminated against by faculty members in the classroom as a result of their fraternity/sorority affiliation, their perceptions of fraternity/sorority academic performance prior to joining the community, their current perception of fraternity/sorority academic performance compared to their non-affiliated fellow students, and their perceived academic engagement (mentally and physically present in the classroom, utilizing faculty office hours, positive classroom participation, completing course assignments, and interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom).

Data

A total of 58 surveys (29.9 %) were returned from the 194 full-time faculty members. Among the 2,269 non-affiliated students, 470 (20.7%) returned completed surveys. The 323 fraternity/sorority members surveyed returned 215 (66.6%) completed surveys. Self-reported quantitative data were collected from the fraternity/sorority new member classes from fall 2004 and spring 2005 for a total of 115 new members who joined the ten organizations during the time period of the study.

Data Analysis

The primary researcher conducted content analysis on open-ended surveys within group by item. Written responses were coded using a constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (Schumacher & McMillan, 2003). As codes were developed, prior responses were reviewed for content until categories and themes emerged from the verbal data within each respondent group (faculty members, non-affiliated students, and fraternity/sorority members). In order to gain an outsider's (etic) view of un-

dergraduate fraternity/sorority members, non-affiliated students were asked to provide their perceptions about the academic engagement of affiliated fraternity and sorority students in their undergraduate classes. The fraternity/sorority members provided the insider (emic) perceptions of their academic engagement inside and outside the classroom, and faculty members' open-ended survey questions provided a second, etic window into their perceptions of affiliated students' academic engagement in their university classrooms, laboratories, and playing fields in the case of coaches. The purpose of surveying faculty and staff members, fraternity/sorority members, and non-affiliated students was to triangulate a comprehensive assessment of the perceptions of fraternity/sorority life from three different stakeholders on a liberal arts campus, thus providing multiple forms of evidence.

Results

Quantitative Results. Of the 115 fraternity/sorority new members in the quantitative sample, 71.3% (n = 82) of them were women. More than half, 53.9% were in the sophomore class, (n = 62), 37.4% freshmen (n = 43), 6.1% were juniors (n = 7), and 2.6% were seniors (n = 3). About 75% were in-state students. The ethnic breakdown was 65% White, 10% Declined to Answer, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 8% Asian American, 5% Multiethnic, and 3% African-American.

After analyzing the mean GPAs for all students over the course of the three semesters tracked, there was no meaningful statistical difference in GPAs from one semester to the next. While there was a slight decrease of 0.15 GPA from BEFORE to DURING and a slight increase of 0.09 from DURING to AFTER (Table 1), neither GPA change resulted in a statistical difference between pre, during, and after GPA outcomes, $F(2, 342) = 1.994, p = 0.138$ (Table 2).

Fraternity/Sorority Survey: Descriptive Data

A total of 215 total members, or 66.6%, responded to a survey of seventy-two total questions that was a mixture of Likert scale questions and short, open-ended free response qualitative items. Of those surveyed 58.1% ($n = 125$) were females in sororities and 41.9% ($n = 90$) were males in fraternities. All groups were single sex organizations. The majority, 74% ($n = 159$), lived on campus in residence halls, university owned apartment complexes, or in their organization's houses, which were also university owned.

The ethnic breakdown of those fraternity/sorority members responding to the survey mirrored that of the university, with 79.5% ($n = 171$) being White Americans, 7.4% ($n = 16$) Latino/ Spanish Heritage, 5.6% ($n = 12$) Multiracial, 3.3% ($n = 7$) Asian American, 2.3% ($n = 5$) Other, 1.4% ($n = 3$) African American, and .5% ($n = 1$) International Students. A total of 135 fraternity/sorority members (64.6%) reported they were in-state students.

The class breakdown was evenly split. Of the fraternity/sorority members who responded to the survey, 28.8% ($n = 62$) were seniors, 27.4% ($n = 59$) were juniors, 29.8% ($n = 64$) were sophomores, and 11.2% ($n = 24$) were second-semester freshmen. In addition, there were 3 students (1.4%) who declared to be fifth-year seniors and another 3 students (1.4%) who declared to be graduate students. The most common undergraduate majors among fraternity/sorority members were Business Administration

Table 1
Fraternity/Sorority New Members' GPAs Before, During, and After Their Affiliation (Mean, Median, and Standard Deviation)

N = 115	GPA Before	GPA During	GPA After
Mean	3.25	3.10	3.19
Median	3.33	3.19	3.31
Standard Deviation	0.49	0.58	.64

(15.5%; *n* = 30), followed by Communicative Disorders (8.8%; *n* = 17), Psychology (8.8%; *n*= 17), and Government (7.2%; *n* = 14).

Of the fraternity/sorority members surveyed, 100% responded to having a cumulative undergraduate GPA of at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. There were 97.5% (*n* = 209) who stated they had above a 2.5 cumulative undergraduate GPA, and 72.5% (*n* = 155) who stated they had above a 3.0 cumulative undergraduate GPA. There were 52% (*n* = 112) who stated they had above a 3.3 cumulative undergraduate GPA, and 31.5% (*n* = 68) who stated they had above a 3.5 cumulative undergraduate GPA. Finally, 5.5% (*n* = 12) of affiliated students participating in the survey stated they had between a 3.80 and 4.0 cumulative undergraduate GPA.

Asked about their employment time commitments, 46.7% (*n* = 97) of fraternity/sorority members surveyed worked between 6-15 hours per week in a paid job, which included on-campus work-study, during the current academic year, while 14.3% (*n* = 31) worked 16 or more hours per week. Another 30% of fraternity/sorority members surveyed were not employed while attending school during the 2005-2006 academic year.

Queried about their time commitment towards studying outside of the classroom, 85.2% (*n* =178) of fraternity/sorority members surveyed studied six or more hours per week during the 2005-2006 academic year, while 45.8% (*n* = 96) said they studied 11 or more hours per week. Central to this survey, fraternity/sorority members stated that during the semester they were going through the new member education process, 92.9% (*n* = 194) studied six or more hours per week, while 55.2% (*n* = 116) reported they studied 11 or more hours per week.

Fraternity/Sorority Survey: Perceptions of Academic Performance

A seven-point Likert Scale was used for quantitative survey items, with "Not Applicable" being one of the options. The options were: 1 = *Not at All*, 2 and 3 = *Slightly or Hardly at All*, 4 and 5 = *Moderately,* 6 and 7 = *Extremely*. The survey items asked, "To what degree has your fraternity/sorority experience enhanced your ability to 'X?'" The eighteen survey items dealt with Academics, Personal Development, Leadership Development, and Fraternity/sorority Life Success.

Of the 206 fraternity/sorority members reporting these data, 22.9% (*n* = 46) responded by saying that their ability to prepare for tests was extremely enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience and an additional 55% (*n* = 123) responded by saying their ability to prepare for tests was moderately enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience. Asked about their ability to engage faculty outside of the classroom 32.5% (*n* = 67) of fraternity/sorority members surveyed responded by saying that their ability was extremely enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience and an added 44.1% (*n* = 91) responded by saying it was moderately enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience. When asked about their ability to set higher academic goals, 42% (*n* = 86) of fraternity/sorority members surveyed responded by saying that their ability was extremely enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience and an additional 43.5% (*n*= 89) responded by saying it was moderately enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience.

When asked about their ability to establish an effective study schedule 37.1% (*n* = 76) of fraternity/sorority members surveyed responded by saying that their ability was extremely enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience and an added 49.7% (*n* = 102) responded by saying it was moderately enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience. When asked about their ability to set priorities to accomplish what is most important, 58.3% (*n*= 120) of fraternity/sorority members surveyed responded by saying that their ability was extremely enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience and an additional 34.4% (*n* = 71) responded by saying it was moderately enhanced by their fraternity/

sorority experience. When asked about their ability to organize time to meet responsibilities, 66.4% (n = 136) of fraternity/sorority members surveyed responded by saying that their ability was extremely enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience and an added 29.7% (n= 61) responded by saying it was moderately enhanced by their fraternity/sorority experience.

Faculty Survey: Descriptive Data

The demographics of the faculty members who completed the 25-question survey (58 out of 194, or 29.9%) were as follows. Nearly nine in 10, 89.7% (n = 52) had taught and/or researched exclusively at the host institution for three or more years. A total of 96.6% (n = 56) faculty members had taught and/or researched at the college level for three or more years, and 25.8% (n = 15) of that group had taught at the college level for twenty-one or more years.

Of the faculty members (including coaches who had faculty status) surveyed, 52.7% (n = 29) were full-time, tenured faculty and another 43.6% (n = 24) were full-time, tenure-track professors. The percentage of faculty members who have been, or were at the time of the survey, advisors of a student club or organization was 62.5% (n = 35). The percentage of faculty members who have been, or were advisors to either a fraternity or sorority was 19.3% (n = 11). More than 20% (n = 12) was a member of a social fraternity or sorority during their undergraduate experience.

Faculty and Non-Affiliated Students Surveys: Perceptions of Fraternity/Sorority Members

Faculty and Non-affiliated Students were asked to respond to items based on a five option Likert survey, *Mostly Positive, Slightly Positive, Neutral, Slightly Negative,* and *Mostly Negative*. Response categories Mostly Positive and Slightly Positive, and Mostly Negative and Slightly Negative, were collapsed into Positive and Negative for the purposes of this article, and are shown in tandem with the perceptions of non-affiliated students on the same items below (Table 2).

Of the faculty members surveyed, 45.1% (n=23) had a negative view of fraternity/sorority members, and 15.7% (n =8) had a positive perception of students affiliated with fraternities or sororities. Asked about their perception of fraternity/sorority GPAs, almost half (49%) claimed neutral, while 35.3% (n =18) stated they had a negative perception. The same percentage of faculty members, 15.7% (n =8), had a positive perception of students affiliated with fraternities or sororities and had a positive perception of their GPAs.

Of the faculty members surveyed, 31.3% (n=16) had a negative opinion of affiliated students' behavior inside the classroom. Again, 15.7% (n =8) saw their behavior as positive inside the classroom and 54.9% (n =28) surveyed had a negative opinion of affiliated students' behavior outside the classroom, while 9.8% (n=5) saw their behavior as positive outside the classroom.

Asked about leadership development and community service efforts completed by affiliated students, 35.3% (n =18) of the faculty surveyed had a positive perception of fraternity/sorority members' leadership development and 58.8% (n =30) had a positive perception towards their community service efforts. However, 54.9 % (n = 28) held a negative view about affiliated students' academic engagement.

Table 2

One-way ANOVA of Fraternity/Sorority New Members' GPAs Before, During, and After Their Affiliation

GPA/Sem	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	sig.
Between	1.311	2	.656	1.994	.138
Within	112.415	342	.329		
Total	113.726	344			

Non-Affiliated Student Survey: Descriptive Data

The demographics of the non-affiliated students surveyed were as follows: There were 138 (29.3%) freshmen, 131 (27.8%) sophomores, 93 (19.7%) juniors, and 103 (21.9%) seniors who responded to the survey. In addition, there were five students (1.1%) who stated they were fifth-year seniors. Of the 2,269 students who were emailed the 30-question survey, 20.7%, or 470 students, responded. The non-affiliated students were asked if they participated in extracurricular activities and 63.6% (n = 299) had a positive response; however, 21% (n = 77) stated that they had participated in Fraternity/Sorority rush or pledging.

Non-Affiliated Student Survey: Academics

During an average week, 92.4% (n = 340) of the non-affiliated students said they spent six or more hours in the classroom. However, 77% (n = 283) said they studied four or more hours, only 56.5% (n = 208) say they studied 6 or more hours, and just 23.6% (n = 87) said they studied 11 or more hours per week.

Non-Affiliated Student Survey: Perceptions of Fraternity/Sorority Members

Similar to the faculty perception data, non-affiliated student perceptions were collapsed into three categories, Positive, Neutral, and Negative (see Table 3). While fraternity/sorority members prided themselves on their leadership skills and their community service endeavors, based on this survey, non-affiliated students did not agree with their affiliated colleagues. When asked about fraternity/sorority leadership development skills, among non-affiliated students 48.3% (n = 194) claimed neutral, 16.4% (n = 66) had a negative view, and 35.3% (n = 141) thought it was positive (see Table 2). Slightly more positive was community service; 46.6% (n= 186) of the respondents saw this as positive, 35.6% (n = 143) were neutral, and 17.9% (n = 72) viewed fraternity/sorority community service efforts negatively. Finally, when asked about fraternity/sorority members' social lives, more than two in five non-affiliated students (40.1%) had a negative perception, 24.1% (n = 97) were neutral, and 35.9% (n = 144) had a positive perception. Interestingly, 89.9% of non-affiliated students said they socialized up to ten hours a week; however, nearly half, 48.9% (n = 25) said they socialized less than one hour per week with fraternity/sorority members.

In general, the majority of non-affiliated students were neutral when asked about the academic lives of fraternity/sorority members. When specifically asked about their perception of fraternity/sorority members' grade point averages, 52.5% (n = 211) claimed neutral, while 25.7% (n =102) had a positive perception and 21.9% (n =88) had a negative perception. When asked about their perception of students who are affiliated with social fraternities or sororities, 31.4% (n =126) claimed neutral, 25.4% (n =102) had a positive perception; however, 43.2% (n =173) had a negative perception.

Faculty Survey Qualitative Results

Qualitative outcomes are presented first for faculty members, then non-affiliated students, and finally, affiliated students. Keep in mind that the open-ended survey questions were not completely parallel in their construction. Faculty members' anecdotal statements about their perceptions of fraternity and sorority members were culled from written, open-ended questions on the faculty survey. Written comments were consistent with surveyed faculty perceptions (Table 2) that tended toward the negative.

- During the [pledging] period, individual students' grades appear to go down. I would expect if you took a survey of the Greek GPAs against the entire campus, it would be higher. This gives you the false impression that Greek Life is good for academics.
- I have noticed that students often have a small to significant downturn in their

Table 3

Perceptions of Faculty Members and Non-Affiliated Students Toward Fraternity/Sorority Life

Measures	Mostly/Slightly Postitive	Neutral	Mostly/Slightly Negative
Perceptions of F/S Overall			
Faculty (n = 51)	15.7%	39.2%	45.1%
Non-Affiliated (n = 401)	25.5%	31.4%	43.2%
F/S GPA			
Faculty (n = 51)	15.7%	49.0%	35.3%
Non-Affiliated (n = 401)	25.4%	52.6%	21.9%
F/S Academic Engagement			
Faculty (n = 51)	11.8%	33.3%	54.9%
Non-Affiliated (n = 401)	28.9%	54.4%	16.7%
F/S Behavior in the Classroom			
Faculty (n = 51)	15.7%	52.9%	31.3%
Non-Affiliated (n = 401)	25.5%	52.1%	22.5%
F/S Behavior outside the Classroom			
Faculty (n = 51)	9.8%	35.3%	54.9%
Non-Affiliated (n = 401)	20.0%	27.2%	52.9%
F/S Social Life			
Faculty (n = 51)	19.6%	23.5%	56.9%
Non-Affiliated (n = 401)	35.9%	24.2%	39.9%
F/S Leadership Development			
Faculty (n = 51)	35.3%	43.1%	21.6%
Non-Affiliated (n = 401)	35.2%	48.4%	16.5%
F/S Community Service			
Faculty (n = 51)	58.8%	31.4%	9.8%
Non-Affiliated (n = 401)	46.4%	35.7%	17.9%

academic performance during rush. Also, I have known a few students who have been heavily involved in fraternities or sororities, and that involvement does often take up quite a bit of their time to the detriment of their academic work.

- I believe there is a correlation between lower GPAs and pledging and attention needs to be paid this area to create the best environment for new Greek members as possible.
- Despite all PR about study hours etc., I always see pledge students' grades drop.

Other faculty members' anecdotal statements about their perceptions of fraternity and sorority members' academic engagement during the new member, or pledging, process are detailed below. The pledge period was a particular source of faculty member's ire.

- Zero [academic engagement] during pledging; the same value they get on assignments and tests during pledging. They are not alert in class, always sleepy or exhausted, and cannot successfully complete weekly assignments.
- My response is shaped primarily by the

many weeks around pledging. Even great students seem to drop off a cliff during the weeks of pledging. They are tired, distracted, and there is almost always a huge drop off in performance not only by students who are pledging, but by other students who get involved in the social activities. Pledging season has a very negative impact on classroom time on our campus.

- Again, it is VERY NEGATIVE with regard to those who are pledging; for all others, it is neutral, at least in my classes. I do hear stories from other professors about continuing problems with students after pledging, but that has not been my experience.
- When students miss class or sleep in class on Fridays because of Thursday night parties, I think there is something very wrong with the fraternity/sorority system! There is no way that it can be considered "co-curricular" when it has such a negative impact on academics.

However, not all faculty members found fraternity/sorority affiliation to be an academic disadvantage. At least some faculty members, as reflected below, found the social connectedness nurtured within fraternity and sorority life to be an occupational asset.

- Not sure I can identify a huge difference. Often Greek students are more confident, given I teach Speech this is relevant. They think they are more worldly, and often are. Sometimes, like [students participating in a special alternative education program at the university], I fear they believe they are more entitled. However, from my discipline their Greek life is an asset.

Non-affiliated students' anecdotal statements about their perceptions of fraternity and sorority members taken from the open-ended section of the non-affiliated survey offered additional insight into their perception of fraternity/sorority life on their campus. Non-affiliated students appeared to be very aware of the party-oriented aspects of fraternity/sorority life on the campus in question.

- I live with an individual involved in the Greek system, and I feel that the amount of drinking and inappropriate behavior apropos the Greeks is excessive and tarnishes the school's reputation as an academic institution primarily focused on education.
- I feel that a lot of Greeks just party, the ones that are in my classes don't actively participate; some have missed month's worth of classes. Especially within fraternities, a lot of the members come off as slackers.
- There are a few individuals who do not responsibly represent their fraternity or sorority.

Additionally, non-affiliated students were also very aware of the manner in which members treated their "brothers" and "sisters" on a personal level, and doubted whether community service as performed by the groups was a sincere activity motivated by altruistic purposes.

- They speak about their own brothers and sisters in negative ways, they are always drunk and sleeping around (not a stereotype), and their "community service" is a joke.
- Pretty negatively for the girls in sororities, not as much for the guys in fraternities. The girls seem to all come from the same stupid mold, they lack any individuality. Many of them disgust me!

Non-Affiliated Student Survey: Perceptions of Fraternity/sorority Members

Below are the written voices representative of non-affiliated students about their perceptions of fraternity and sorority members' grade point averages and academic engagement. One emerging theme was an association made between partying, activities, and poor academic performance.

- I am assuming that with all of their partying that their grades cannot be that great. I am sure that some have good grades while the majority probably does not.
- Everyone I know who is in Greek life is having serious trouble with their grades this year. They don't have time for academics with their activities.
- There is no way that they [F/S grades] are higher due to being in it [a fraternity or sorority]. I think it would only have a negative result on someone's potential.

Some non-affiliated students recognized that fraternity/sorority affiliation meant more than just an active social life to a member, and acknowledged that there were members within the organizations with outstanding academic records.

- I think Greek students get a label slapped on them as stupid and only in the organization for drinking. My roommate is in a sorority and is Phi Beta Kappa. There are some really intelligent Greek life students on this campus.

Still, other non-affiliated respondents found fraternity and sorority members to be no different than other students or groups of students on their college campus.

- Some are smart, some are dumb. Just like most people.
- I don't think they are that different from any other student, especially athletes. An athletic team is basically a fraternity or sorority.

Finally, at least one non-affiliated student seemed to echo the faculty's lament about fraternity and sorority affiliated students being disengaged in their classes.

- My experiences have tended to be that Greek students have not engaged as fully or contributed as much in discussion-oriented classes.
- Mostly neutral, slightly negative. I don't see an over average emphasis from the Greek students on academics. They seem to be about on par with the average for the university as a whole. If academic leadership is their goal, they need to try harder.

Discussion

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data from this study, there was no statistical difference in the GPAs across the semester prior, during or after affiliation for students involved in the new member process of the fraternity/sorority community (Table 2). This is not to say that students' academic performances were not affected by the new member process. Clearly, faculty members and non-affiliated students complained about problems with fraternity/sorority new members in their classroom who were not academically engaged. Lack of sufficient sleep, inattentiveness during class, and deficient academic focus were all cited by faculty members towards fraternity/sorority members during the new member process.

Conversely, affiliated students perceived their academic and social skills to be enhanced based on their affiliation with their fraternity or sorority. The affiliated survey data clearly showed that fraternity/sorority life had a positive impact on students' perception of their leadership skills, personal development, commitment to high academic standards, social development, and overall college success.

Is it a myth that fraternity/sorority members are not as academically engaged as their non-affiliated counterparts or a self-fulfilling prophesy? Are faculty members so used to seeing a few fraternity/sorority members struggling academically that they generalize negative perceptions towards all affiliated students? Do fraternity/sorority members portray themselves to their faculty members in such a way that they perpetuate stereotypes? Would there be an increase in fraternity/sorority GPAs if biases were eliminated? Equally important, would there be an increase in fraternity/sorority GPAs if the new member

process was reframed to be more academically engaging?

Affiliated students, faculty advisors, and student life professional staff members need to implement better academic programs for all students, not just newly affiliated students. All groups surveyed agreed that the new member process was the most significant issue affecting fraternity/sorority academic life. While the fraternity/sorority respondents perceived the faculty as viewing them as an academically engaged community (77.1%), most faculty members saw affiliated students as academically unengaged (54.9%). The difference in perception was large, which the researchers believed has its roots in two areas: 1) there was no clear definition of *academic engagement* by the fraternity/sorority community, nor by the faculty at this institution, and 2) faculty members' biases, whether conscious or unconscious, towards affiliated students continued to perpetuate negative academic stereotypes (Abrahamowicz, 1988). Despite affiliated students all being unique individuals, affiliated students appeared to have an identity label (Jones & McEwen, 2000) placed on them as if all shared the same characteristics and lived experiences.

Miscommunication between faculty members, affiliated and non-affiliated students will continue unless initiatives are taken to find common ground. In this case, all parties need to become better educated about the other's perceptions. The first step is to make each party aware of the major problems (lack of academic engagement and unwarranted biases). Since "group membership is an option…and individuals favor groups they belong to in order to increase their self-esteem" (Wells & Corts, 2008, ¶ 16), it may not be possible to entirely mitigate these stereotypical perceptions. Step two is to begin a campus-wide dialogue on the definition of academic engagement as well as the determination of fraternity / sorority life value-added outcomes to the mission of university education. The objective of The Franklin Square Group was just such a call for campus-wide discussion and values congruence (Rogers, ND).

The principal researcher began this case study by suggesting based on his personal experience that many faculty members held perceptions that there were no value-added academic or educational outcomes associated with fraternity / sorority life. The GPA data analysis (Table 2) revealed that there was no statistical difference in affiliated new members' GPAs from one semester to the next. Survey data, both quantitative and qualitative, confirmed major differences in the manner fraternity / sorority activities were viewed across the three groups, and supported other research finding similar differences (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Wells & Corts, 2008)

The principal researcher suggests that these data be used as a motivator for the fraternity/sorority community to strive for an increase, whether significant or not, in their GPA from one semester to the next. More importantly than the GPA progression, affiliated students need to realize that being actively engaged in and out of the classroom is central to their success since the perception of their success, in the eyes of the faculty, is tied to academic engagement. And academic engagement, in faculty members' personal and professional lives, is measured via the metric of the grade point average.

Limitations

The most glaring limitation of the present case study was that the three surveys for affiliated, non-affiliated, and faculty constituencies were not completely parallel in form (Yin, 2003). Future research of a similar nature should be developed with clearly parallel items across all three groups for comparative analysis, and should include multiple campuses. Engaging representatives of all three groups in the construction of the survey instruments would also be helpful. Whereas a content analysis of open-ended written responses were reported in the present case study, a much stronger design would include targeted focus groups drawn from identifiable cam-

pus stakeholders.

Conclusion

A renewed interest in fraternity/sorority academic achievement has emerged on a national level (Gamma Sigma Alpha Annotated Bibliography, 2007). Millennial fraternity and sorority members are increasingly embracing academic success as an important value. Campus professional staff can capitalize on this trend by asking chapters and individuals to revisit their scholarship objectives and holding members accountable to the organizational principles of their fraternity that support their undergraduate institutions' missions.

Randall and Grady (1998) reported in their article *The Greek Experience and Critical-Thinking Skills* that there were positive effects stemming from fraternity/sorority life, clubs and organizations, faculty interaction, peer interaction, living on campus, and employment of critical thinking. Students involved in these activities experienced a positive gain in critical thinking compared to students who were not involved (p. 29). The same could be said for fraternity and sorority life and the four pillars of success; academics, leadership, community service efforts, and kinship. These positive gains should not be overlooked, especially as the fraternity and sorority community moves towards dispelling decade-old myths of slothfulness. The GPA data showed that for this group of affiliated students there was no statistical difference (Table 2) in the grade point averages of new members when compared to the semesters prior to and after joining the fraternity/sorority community at this liberal arts campus, which runs counter to prevailing perceptions about the effects of membership on academic achievement. In addition, the benefits that affiliated students acknowledge they are receiving due to their membership are indications that they believe they are developing a well-rounded core set of value-added skills.

The literature and research reveal many advantages to Greek Life; "… they identified the benefits derived from Greek membership, which included such frequently made claims as the ability of fraternities to make integration into campus life more easy, the sense of community and lasting friendships they provide, the opportunities they give to develop leadership and social skills and to perform social service, their encouragement of high ideals and academic achievement, and the network of contacts they engendered that would extend beyond college" (Neuberger & Hanson, 1997, p, 95).

As fraternity and sorority life moves forward, stakeholders must find ways to successfully showcase organizational and individual successes to faculty members. By the same token, the leadership of the fraternity/sorority community must be more attentive when faculty members give suggestions on how to become, and stay, academically engaged.

It is important to realize that administrators who oversee fraternity and sorority life have a crucial role in bridging the connection between affiliated students and faculty members. There is no clear solution to this challenge; however, "continued study of the impact of student affairs administrators rather than faculty members might offer suggestions on how faculty members and student affairs staff members could work together to ensure that students maximally profit from both groups" (Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999, p. 8). The goal should be to find common ground that infuses into the fraternity/sorority experience a new 21st century structure that benefits both entities. When "Greek students feel actively engaged by their community . . . they feel a sense of community and feel that their community has shaped their identity" (Blackburn, 2003, p. 52). Faculty members need to be active participants in this equation.

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