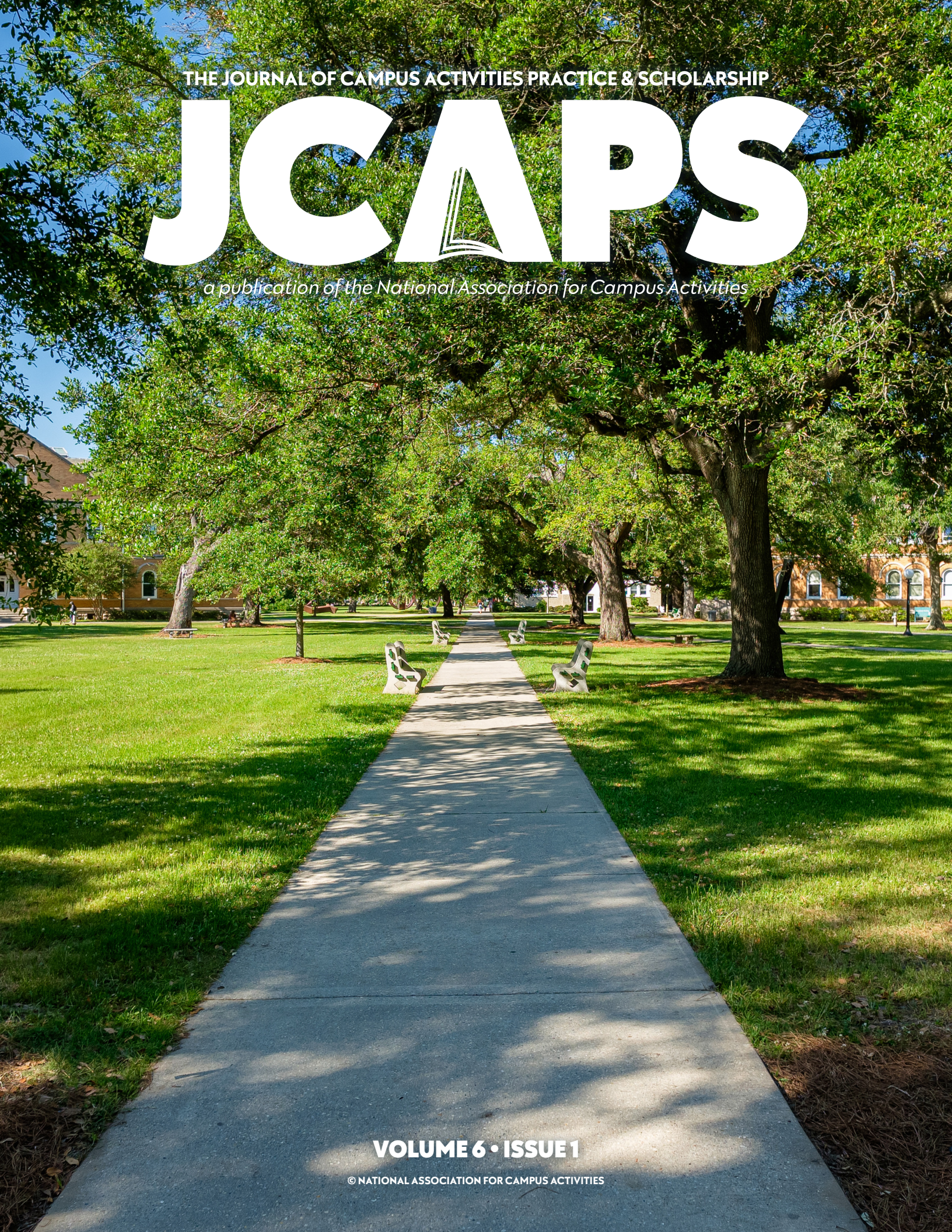

THE JOURNAL OF CAMPUS ACTIVITIES PRACTICE & SCHOLARSHIP

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THE FRATERNITY/SORORITY EXPERIENCE REVISITED: THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FRATERNITY/SORORITY MEMBERSHIP AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING OUTCOMES, GRADES, AND SATISFACTION WITH COLLEGE.

Gary Pike, Indiana University
Dawn Wiese, FRMT, Ltd.

Fraternities and sororities are an important part of American higher education. However, some scholars question the value of fraternities and sororities. Recent research on the educational outcomes of fraternity/sorority membership is limited, with more research focused on health and safety issues. The present research addresses the gap in the literature by examining the direct and indirect relationships among fraternity/sorority membership, student engagement, and college outcomes using structural equation modeling and data from the 2017 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Results revealed fraternity/sorority membership had significant, positive direct relationships with student engagement and strong positive indirect relationships with self-reports of learning and acting through student engagement. Moreover, despite being less diverse than students in general, fraternity/sorority members reported higher levels of interaction with people different from themselves than did other students. In addition, the largest positive effects were generally found for first-year students, arguing against deferring recruitment until the second semester or second year. Membership in a fraternity or sorority was negatively related to self-reported grades, particularly for males and seniors.

Fraternities and sororities are an important part of American higher education, with more than 750,000 undergraduate members and at least 9 million living alumni in the United States (Routon & Walker, 2019). The espoused values of these organizations align closely with the goals of postsecondary education (Cogswell et al., 2020). However, concerns about alcohol and other drug use, hazing, sexual misconduct, and the contributions of fraternities and sororities to student learning and development have led some writers to question the value added by fraternities and sororities (Gregory, 2020; Kuh et al., 1996). When researching fraternities and sororities, a current review of the literature is more likely to secure studies on health and human behavior than on the positive attributes of these organizations.

While lines of research focusing on health, safety, and wellness are undoubtedly important as part of the total picture of what is happening in these organizations on today's college campus, research exploring questions on fraternity and sorority membership and engagement and outcomes in the 1990s and early 2000s is less prevalent today. Specifically, this research intends to explore the following areas of inquiry: First, we intend to address a gap in the research literature by revisiting, in the present day, the direct and indirect relationships among fraternity/sorority membership, student involvement, and engagement, and college outcomes employing a structural equation modeling. Second, we seek to understand present-day outcomes, in comparison with those of the 1990s, to determine if positive findings of the late 1990s remain consistent twenty years later and, if so, create replicable research.

Pike, G. & Weise, D. (2024). The fraternity/sorority experience revisited: The relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and student engagement, learning outcomes, graders, and satisfaction with college. *Journal of Campus Activities Practice and Scholarship, 6*(1), 5-19. **https://doi.org/ 10.52499/2024002.**

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Fraternity and Sorority Affiliation and Student Engagement

The origins of student engagement can be found in the works of Pace (1980), Astin (1984), and Kuh (2001), and research has consistently found positive relationships between engagement and success in college (Astin, 1977, 1993; Kuh et al., 2006). Membership in a fraternity or sorority represents one method of encouraging student involvement and engagement in educational activities. It is important not to conflate the concepts of involvement and engagement. Wolf-Wendel and researchers (2009) differentiate between involvement and engagement, noting that involvement in campus life is noteworthy in terms of the amount of time and energy students invest in predominantly out-of-class or co-curricular (Peck et al., 2016) experiences while paying some attention to the contribution of the environment in which students find themselves. Engagement differs in that the focus includes the time and effort students may place in both in-class or curricular (Peck et al., 2016) and out-of-class activities and how colleges and universities allocate resources to encourage student participation in these activities. This study considers both involvement and engagement as students in fraternities and sororities may invest significant time and effort in this out-of-class experience (involvement), which may also impact engagement in campus life inside and outside the classroom.

Studies exploring the relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and student engagement have produced inconsistent results. Astin (1977, 1993) and Pike and Askew (1990) found that students in Greek organizations were more involved than their non-Greek counterparts. However, Kuh et al. (1996) found a negative relationship between student engagement and fraternity/sorority membership, while Pike (1996), in the same year, found fraternity/sorority membership had a positive relationship with engagement and gains in learning with effects for fraternity/sorority affiliation stronger for seniors than first-year students.

Research findings on fraternity/sorority affiliation and cocurricular/social involvement tend to reinforce stereotypes of the fraternal system. Dugan (2013) and Walker et al. (2015) found that fraternity/sorority members were highly involved in social activities, including partying. Fraternity/sorority members also reported relatively few interactions with students who differed from themselves (Asel et al., 2009; Porter, 2012). On a positive note, fraternity/sorority members were more likely to be engaged in community service and other co-curricular activities (Asel et al., 2009; Bureau et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2015).

The relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and student involvement and engagement also appear to be moderated by students' background characteristics. For example, Porter (2012) and Routon and Walker (2014) found significant differences in the relationships between fraternity or membership and student involvement and engagement by gender. Other researchers have reported differences in fraternity/sorority membership and student involvement and engagement by class level (Asel et al., 2009; Pike, 2003; Porter, 2012; Walker et al., 2015).

Fraternity and Sorority Affiliation and Student Learning Outcomes

In separate literature reviews, Biddix et al. (2014) and Martin et al. (2020) reported that studies of the relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and objective measures of learning outcomes have produced inconsistent, although somewhat negative, results. When self-reports have been used to represent learning outcomes, the results have been somewhat more positive (Ahern et al., 2014; Bureau et al., 2011). Research by Asel et al. (2009), Hayek et al. (2002), and Routon and Walker (2016) found that fraternity/sorority affiliation was positively related to students' reports of their personal/social development. In contrast, early studies by Wilder and his colleagues found that fraternity and sorority members scored significantly lower than other students on measures of personal development (Wilder et al., 1978; Wilder et al., 1986). Here again, inconsistent findings may be partly attributable to moderating effects for gender (Hevel et al., 2015; Pascarella et al., 1996; Routon & Walker, 2016) and class standing (Pascarella et al., 2001; Pike, 2003). Pike (2000) also found that fraternity/sorority membership was indirectly related to learning outcomes, acting through student engagement.

Fraternity and Sorority Affiliation and Grades in College

Research on the relationship between fraternity/sorority membership and students' grade point averages (GPA)

has, like research in other areas, produced inconsistent results. Ahern et al. (2014) and DeBard and Sacks (2010) found that fraternity/sorority affiliation was positively related to GPA. In contrast, Asel et al. (2009) and Bureau et al. (2011) found fraternity/sorority membership was negatively related to GPA. Nelson et al. (2006) and Pike and Askew (1990) found no relationship between fraternity/sorority membership and GPA. Here again, research suggests that the relationship between fraternity/sorority membership and GPA may be moderated by year in school (DeBard et al., 2006; DeBard and Sacks, 2010; Nelson et al., 2006) and gender (Routon & Walker, 2014).

Conclusions Regarding Fraternity/Sorority Affiliation, Student Involvement and Engagement, and College Outcomes

The primary conclusion from research on the relationships among membership in a fraternity or sorority, student involvement and engagement, and college outcomes is that studies have produced inconsistent results. At least some of the variance in the findings may be attributable to the types of involvement and engagement and the types of outcomes studied. For example, fraternity/sorority membership appears to be most consistently (and positively) related to collaborative learning but negatively related to interactions with diverse others. Membership in a fraternity or sorority also appears to be most strongly related to students' personal development. These findings argue for examining the effects of fraternity/sorority membership on a wide variety of types of involvement and engagement and outcomes.

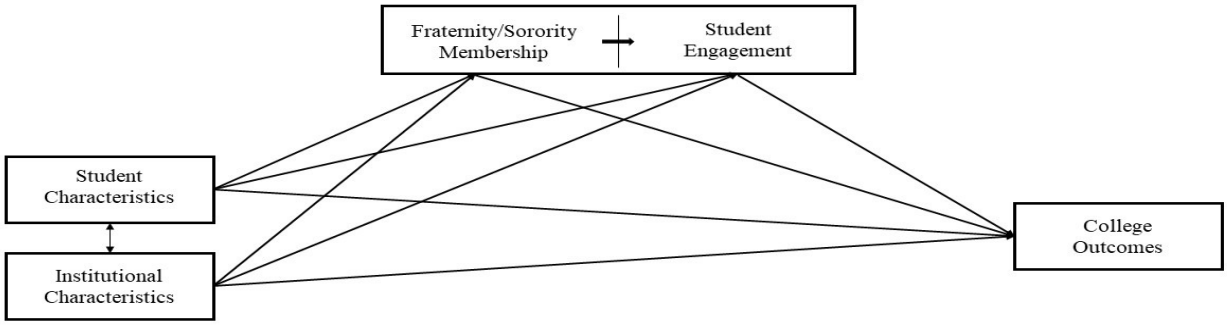
Another reason for mixed results may be the moderating effects of gender and year in school. Several studies obtained different results for females and males and first-year students and seniors. In order to adequately account for these potential moderators, research on fraternity/sorority membership should separately examine relationships for males and females and first-year and senior students. Accordingly, this study examined the effects of fraternity/sorority membership for male and female first-year and senior students. In addition, the model used in this research identified both the direct and indirect relationships among fraternity/sorority membership, student involvement and engagement, and college outcomes.

METHODS

Conceptual Model

Many of the theories and models of the effects of college on students posit that college outcomes are products of students' pre-college characteristics, institutional characteristics, and students' experiences during college (Astin, 1970a, 1970b, 1984; Kuh et al., 2006; Pace, 1980; Pascarella, 1986). The design used in this research employs the conceptual framework of Astin's (1970a, 1970b) I-E-O model. In I–E–O, individual characteristics are controlled to isolate the effect of on-campus participation in various academic and social activities on various outcomes. According to Astin (1984), "The advent of involvement theory led to the elaboration of the IEO model to include 'involvement' (also called 'intermediate outcomes') as an additional construct situated between Environment and Outcome (IEO)." In the present model, student and institutional characteristics are presumed to influence college experiences and outcomes. Within the college-experience domain, fraternity or sorority membership is presumed to influence student involvement and engagement. In turn, fraternity/sorority affiliation and involvement are presumed to influence student outcomes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Conceptual Model of the Relationships among Student and Institutional Characteristics, College Experiences, and College Outcomes*



Data Source

The data for this research came from the 2017 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). In 2017, slightly more than 165,000 first-year students and almost 210,000 seniors from 650 institutions participated in NSSE, with an average institutional response rate of 30% (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017a). Complete data were available for 184,816 students attending 541 institutions. The sample included 81,143 first-year students (54,701 females and 26,442 males) and 103,673 seniors (66,644 females and 37,029 males). Table 1 presents sample means for the study participants. These sample means provide information about proportions in the population, as sample means can be used to calculate central tendency, standard deviation, and variance.

Table 1. *Sample Means for Student Participants: First-Year and Senior/Male and Female Samples*

Variable	**First-Year**		**Senior**	
	Female	***Male***	***Female***	***Male***
Carnegie Doctoral	0.37	0.42	0.37	0.44
Carnegie Master's	0.47	0.42	0.49	0.43
Carnegie Baccalaureate	0.16	0.16	0.14	0.13
Carnegie Other	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01
Public Institution	0.63	0.64	0.67	0.69
Small Institution	0.22	0.20	0.19	0.16
Medium Institution	0.16	0.14	0.14	0.12
Large Institution	0.22	0.19	0.23	0.20
Very Large Institution	0.40	0.46	0.44	0.53
Fraternity/Sorority Member	0.10	0.09	0.12	0.12
Asian American	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.07
Black	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.06
Latinx	0.14	0.14	0.13	0.13
Multiracial	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03
Other Race/Ethnicity	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
White	0.65	0.66	0.68	0.69
First-Generation	0.32	0.27	0.33	0.30
Non-Traditional Age	0.02	0.03	0.24	0.32
Full-Time Enrollment	0.97	0.97	0.88	0.87
Transfer Student	0.07	0.07	0.38	0.42
Live On Campus	0.74	0.71	0.20	0.19
Athlete	0.09	0.12	0.06	0.07
Veteran	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.08
Arts/Humanities Major	0.11	0.08	0.11	0.09
Engineering/Science Major	0.22	0.40	0.18	0.37
Social Science Major	0.17	0.11	0.19	0.13
Business Major	0.11	0.18	0.14	0.20
Education/Social Service Major	0.15	0.08	0.15	0.07
Health-Related Major	0.22	0.08	0.18	0.08
Other Major	0.03	0.06	0.05	0.07
Higher-Order Thinking	38.73	37.98	40.77	39.23
Reflective & Integrative Thinking	36.03	34.88	39.47	37.26

Quantitative Reasoning	25.54	29.93	27.61	32.72
Learning Strategies	39.51	36.70	39.02	36.40
Collaborative Learning	34.21	33.81	35.17	35.40
Discussions with Diverse Others	40.32	40.24	41.09	40.53
Student–Faculty Interaction	21.22	21.46	26.40	25.50
Effective Teaching Practices	39.09	39.22	40.31	39.37
Quality Interactions	41.78	42.68	42.04	41.65
Supportive Environment	37.99	36.28	33.96	32.39
High–Impact Practices	0.71	0.69	2.55	2.23
Academic Gains	8.58	8.44	9.39	9.11
Vocational Gains	8.04	8.20	8.86	8.94
Personal/Social Gains	11.03	10.76	11.55	11.00
Grades	6.29	6.05	6.46	6.16

An examination of the means in Table 1 revealed that most of the students in the study attended large or very large public Carnegie Doctoral or Master's institutions. Approximately 10% of the students were fraternity/sorority members. White students were, by far, the largest racial/ethnic group, followed by Latinx and Black students. About one-third of the students were first-generation, and most were enrolled full-time. Relatively few first-year students were non-traditional age or transfers, and most first-year students lived on campus.

Conversely, higher proportions of seniors were non-traditional age or transfers, but relatively few seniors lived on campus. The choice of a college major was more evenly distributed among women than men, with men being more likely to major in engineering and the sciences or business. In general, first-year students reported lower levels of engagement than seniors. The exceptions to this pattern were the Quality of Interactions and Supportive Environment engagement indicators. Self-reports of learning and grades were also slightly higher for seniors than first-year students.

Measures

The measures used in this study came from three sources. Institutional characteristics (Carnegie classification, institutional control, and enrollment size) were obtained by NSSE from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Three measures of student characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, and class standing) were obtained from institutional records submitted by participating colleges and universities as part of the NSSE survey process. All other measures were obtained from students' self-reports using NSSE's questionnaire the *College Student Report*.

There is substantial research about the adequacy and appropriateness of using self-reports in research on college students. Early studies found that students' self-reports were appropriate measures of engagement and learning (Baird, 1976; Berdie, 1971; Dumont & Troelstrup, 1980; Pace, 1985; Pholman & Beggs, 1974). More recently, some researchers have questioned the appropriateness of these measures (Bowman & Hill, 2011; Bowman & Seifert, 2018; Pascarella, 2011; Porter, 2011). Criticisms of self-reports have included the inability of students to precisely quantify their levels of engagement and social desirability.

Several studies have shown that the NSSE engagement indicators yield appropriate measures of student engagement during college (Kuh, 2001; Kuh, et al., 2001; Ouimet et al., 2004; Pascarella et al., 2009). Recent research by Rocconi et al. (2020) found that using vague quantifiers in the *College Student Report* improved the accuracy and appropriateness of self-report data. Studies examining the adequacy and appropriateness of self-reports of learning have focused on the convergence of self-reports with objective measures. Studies by Birdie (1971), Dumont and Troelstrup (1980), and Pholman and Beggs (1974) all found moderate positive correlations between self-reports and test scores. Pike (1995) used multitrait-multimethod analysis to examine the relationships between self-reported learning and standardized test scores. He found consistent, positive correlations between

self-reports and test scores. In a second set of studies, Baird (1976) and Valiga (1986) examined the relationships between self-reports and actual grades. Both studies found that self-reported and actual grades were strongly correlated. Baird's (1976) study also found that students accurately reported their grades, even when there were strong incentives to be inaccurate.

Participants' responses to the NSSE questionnaire yielded four classes of measures: the independent variable (i.e., fraternity/sorority membership), college outcomes, engagement indicators, and covariates. Membership in a fraternity or sorority was measured by the question, "Are you a member of a social fraternity or sorority?" Students' responses were scored so that fraternity/sorority membership was a dichotomous variable indicating that the student was (1) or was not (0) a fraternity/sorority member. College outcomes were represented by four variables. The first three measures, Academic Gains, Vocational Gains, and Personal/Social Gains, were modeled after scales developed by Kuh, et al. (2001). The alpha reliability coefficients for Academic, Vocational, and Personal/Social gains were 0.80, 0.73, and 0.87 for first-year students and 0.82, 0.69, and 0.87 for seniors. Grades in college were measured by the question, "What have most of your grades been up to now at this institution?" Response options ranged from "C– or lower" (1) to "A" (8). To facilitate the interpretation of effect sizes, standard (Z) scores were calculated for the four outcome measures and utilized in the data analysis.

Student engagement was represented by the 10 NSSE engagement indicators and a measure of student participation in high-impact practices. Higher-Order Learning, Reflective and Integrative Learning, Learning Strategies, and Quantitative Reasoning represented the level of academic challenge in students' college experiences. Collaborative Learning and Discussions with Diverse Others were indicators of learning with peers, and Student-Faculty Interaction and Effective Teaching Practices represented students' experiences with faculty members. The campus environment was represented by the engagement indicators Quality of Interactions and a Supportive Environment (National Survey of Student Engagement (2018). The engagement indicators were scored on a scale from 0 to 60, with 0 representing low engagement and 60 representing high levels of engagement. Alpha reliabilities for the engagement indicators ranged from 0.76 to 0.88 for first-year students and 0.77 to 0.89 for seniors (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017b). High-Impact Practices was a count variable indicating participation in three activities for first-year students and six activities for seniors. Engagement indicator scores were standardized for use in the data analysis.

Covariates were included in the analyses to account for some of the preexisting differences between fraternity/sorority members and independent students that might bias the results. These variables represented institutional and student characteristics. Carnegie classification was represented by two dummy-coded variables: Master's institutions and baccalaureate institutions. Doctoral/research universities served as the reference group. Institutional control was a dichotomous variable indicating that an institution was a public college/university. Enrollment size was represented by three dummy-coded variables: small institutions (fewer than 2,500 students), medium institutions (2,500-4,999 students), and large institutions (5,000-9,999 students). Very large institutions (10,000 or more students) served as the reference group.

A student's race/ethnicity was represented by five dummy variables: Asian, Black, Latinx, multiracial, or another race/ethnicity (e.g., Native American or Pacific Islander). White students served as the reference group. International students were not included in the study. Other student characteristics included whether students were first-generation, non-traditional age (i.e., 24 or older), veteran status, full-time enrollment, transferring from another institution, living on campus, and academic major. Major fields were business, education/social services, engineering/science, health, social sciences, and other majors. Arts and humanities majors served as the reference group.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the Stata16 computer program (StataCorp, 2019). Structural equation modeling was used to identify the direct relationships between fraternity/sorority membership, student engagement, and college outcome measures, net the effects of institutional and student characteristics. To accomplish this, institutional/student characteristics were included in the models as covariates. The model also identified indirect relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and college outcomes, mediated by student engage-

ment. Because the study focused on fraternity/sorority membership, direct relationships between institutional/student characteristics and fraternity/sorority membership were not calculated. Separate analyses were conducted for males and females and for first-year and senior students. Because students were nested within institutions, clustered standard errors were used to account for possible dependencies in the data (Sarzosa, 2012). Due to the large number of study participants, extremely conservative levels of statistical significance ($p < 0.001$, $p < 0.0001$).

FINDINGS

Table 2 displays the coefficients representing the direct relationships between membership in a fraternity or sorority and student engagement. Also included in the table are the direct, indirect, and total relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and the college outcome measures. (Complete results for the structural equation model are presented in Appendix A.) An examination of the results for first-year females revealed that sorority membership was positively and significantly related to all but three engagement indicators (Effective Teaching Practices, Quality of Interactions, and High-Impact Practices). The largest effects were found for Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction. Sorority membership had modest direct relationships with both academic gains and personal/social gains, but it was not directly related to vocational gains. However, sorority membership had significant indirect relationships with all three gains measures, and the magnitudes of the indirect relationship were larger than the direct relationships. Sorority membership was not directly related to the grades of first-year females.

Table 2. *Relationships between Fraternity/Sorority Membership and Student Engagement and College Outcomes*

Engagement/Outcome	**First-Year**		**Senior**	
	Female	***Male***	***Female***	***Male***
Higher-Order Learning	0.061†	0.048	0.041	0.063†
Reflective Learning	0.058†	0.067	0.045†	0.104‡
Quantitative Reasoning	0.069†	0.080†	0.050†	0.105‡
Learning Strategies	0.061†	0.082‡	0.035	0.074‡
Collaborative Learning	0.246‡	0.300‡	0.221‡	0.245‡
Discussions Diverse Others	0.098†	0.175‡	0.095‡	0.152‡
Student-Faculty Interaction	0.192‡	0.282‡	0.163‡	0.184‡
Effective Teaching Practices	-0.019	-0.071	0.009	0.004
Quality of Interactions	0.031	-0.056	0.020	-0.041
Supportive Environment	0.100‡	0.081†	0.078‡	0.039
High-Impact Practices	0.055	0.173‡	0.210‡	0.256‡
Academic Gains (Direct)	0.043†	0.064	0.019	0.001
Academic Gains (Indirect)	0.057‡	0.045†	0.048‡	0.047†
Academic Gains (Total)	0.099‡	0.110†	0.066‡	0.047
Vocational Gains (Direct)	0.033	0.055	-0.010	-0.005
Vocational Gains (Indirect)	0.087‡	0.084‡	0.072†	0.066‡
Vocational Gains (Total)	0.120‡	0.139‡	0.062†	0.061
Personal/Social Gains (Direct)	0.044†	0.039	0.016	0.034
Personal/Social Gains (Indirect)	0.073‡	0.076‡	0.059‡	0.055‡
Personal/Social Gains (Total)	0.118‡	0.116‡	0.075‡	0.089‡
Grades (Direct)	-0.041	-0.126‡	-0.091‡	-0.149‡
Grades (Indirect)	-0.001	0.004	0.027‡	0.029‡
Grades (Total)	-0.042	-0.122‡	-0.064‡	-0.119‡
†p < 0.001; ‡p < 0.0001				

The results for first-year males were similar to those for females. Fraternity membership had strong positive relationships with Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction, and it was not related to Effective Teaching Practices and Quality of Interactions. Unlike the results for sorority members, first-year fraternity membership had a strong positive relationship with Discussions with Diverse Others and participation in High-Impact Practices. Differences were also observed for the college outcome measures. Fraternity membership was not directly related to the three gains measures, but the indirect (and total) relationships were positive and statistically significant. In addition, the direct (and total) relationship between membership in a fraternity and grades was negative and significant.

The magnitude of the direct relationships between sorority membership and student engagement measures tended to be slightly weaker for seniors than for first-year females. Nevertheless, the magnitudes of the relationships between seniors' sorority membership and both Collaborative Learning and Student-faculty Interaction were substantial. In addition, sorority membership had a strong positive relationship to participation in high-impact practices. Senior sorority membership was unrelated to Higher-Order Learning, Learning Strategies, Effective Teaching Practices, or Quality of Interactions. The relationships between senior females' membership in a sorority and gains in learning were generally weaker than those for first-year females. Sorority membership was not directly related to any of the gains measures, although membership had positive indirect and total relationships with all three measures of learning gains. Unlike the results for first-year sorority members, seniors' membership in a sorority had a direct, negative relationship with grades that was statistically significant. Although the indirect relationship between sorority membership and grades, mediated by student engagement, was positive, it did not fully offset the substantial negative direct relationship between sorority membership and grades.

Similar to the results for senior females, the relationships between senior males' membership in a fraternity and the student engagement indicators were generally weaker than the relationships for first-year students. Here again, strong relationships were found for Collaborative Learning, Discussions with Diverse Others, Student-Faculty Interaction, and participation in High-Impact Practices. Fraternity membership was not significantly related to seniors' reports of Effective Teaching Practices, Quality of Interactions, or a Supportive Environment. The direct relationships between fraternity membership and seniors' academic, vocational, and personal/social gains were not statistically significant. However, the indirect relationships between fraternity membership and the gains measures were positive and significant. However, only the total effect for the relationship between fraternity membership and seniors' personal/social gains was statistically significant. The relationship between fraternity/sorority affiliation and grades for senior males was negative and statistically significant. In fact, the magnitude of the relationship was greater than the magnitude of the relationship for first-year males. Although the indirect relationship between fraternity membership and grades was positive and statistically significant, it was not sufficient to fully overcome the substantial negative direct relationship between seniors' grades and membership in a fraternity.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research have important implications for research and practice. A strength of this research is that the NSSE surveys provide data representative of the vast majority of students in colleges and universities across the United States. Taking into account differences between fraternity/sorority members and non-members, four major findings emerged from the present study. First and foremost, membership in a fraternity or sorority was associated with significantly higher levels of student engagement, as defined by NSSE, in educationally purposeful activities. Although previous research on fraternity/sorority membership and student engagement produced equivocal results, the findings of this research were very consistent and positive. Members of fraternities and sororities had significantly higher levels of engagement on most of the NSSE engagement measures. The positive relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and engagement were strongest for the Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction engagement indicators. Similar results were reported by Bureau et al. (2011) and Hayek et al. (2002). The present research also found that the relationship between membership in a fraternity or sorority and engagement was moderated by class standing (i.e., being a first-year or senior student). For most engagement indicators, including Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction, the observed relationships were stronger for first-year students than seniors. Similar results were reported by Pike (2003).

Discussions with Diverse Others

A particularly noteworthy finding of this study concerned the diversity experiences of fraternity/sorority members. Previous studies have noted that fraternities and sororities are homogeneous regarding race/ethnicity and social class (Hamilton & Cheng, 2018). These studies also found that members of fraternities and sororities have fewer interactions with students who are different from themselves (Asel et al., 2009; Porter, 2012). While students who attended more racially diverse institutions appear to have more racially diverse friends (Park & Kim, 2013), membership in a fraternity has indicated a negative net gain in the value of openness to diversity (Pascarella et al., 1996) and rates of interracial interaction and friendship (Park & Kim, 2013). It has been hypothesized that the selective and exclusive nature of fraternity and sorority membership selection process has made creating a racially diverse environment a challenge (Joyce, 2020). The current study found that members of fraternities and sororities reported significantly higher levels of Discussions with Diverse Others than did independent students, net the effects of institution and student characteristics. Moreover, the relationship was strongest for fraternity members in both the first year and senior year.

Student Learning Outcomes

The second finding to emerge from this study concerns the relationship between fraternity/sorority membership and student learning outcomes. Previous research examining these relationships produced mixed results, irrespective of whether the learning outcome measures were objective test scores or students' self-reports. Earlier research also found that membership in a fraternity or sorority was more positively related to learning outcomes for students in the second, third, or fourth year of college (Pascarella et al., 2001; Pike, 2003). This finding led Pascarella et al. (2001) to suggest that membership in a fraternity or sorority be deferred until the second semester or second year of college. The findings of the current study sharply contradict the results of previous studies. In general, fraternity/sorority membership was directly, positively, and significantly related to learning gains for first-year students but not for seniors. Significant positive indirect relationships, acting through student engagement, were found for first-year students and seniors in fraternities and sororities. Moreover, the indirect relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and learning gains were generally stronger than the direct relationships.

Fraternity/Sorority Affiliation and Grades

The third finding from the present research is the negative relationship between grades and fraternity/sorority membership. Specifically, membership in a fraternal organization was negatively related to self-reported grades in college for first-year and senior men and senior women. These findings are consistent with the findings of studies by Asel et al. (2009) and Bureau et al. (2011), and differed sharply from studies showing positive relationships between Greek affiliation and grades (Ahren et al., 2014; DeBard & Sacks, 2010) or no relationship at all (Nelson et al., 2006; Pike & Askew, 1990). One surprising finding given research showing a positive relationship between student engagement and grades (Kuh et al., 2006; Pike & Askew, 1990), was the absence of strong, positive indirect relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and grades for first-year students. A second surprising finding was that the negative relationships between fraternity or sorority membership and grades were stronger for seniors than first-year students. This result stands in sharp contrast to the findings of DeBard et al. (2006), DeBard and Sacks (2010), and Nelson et al. (2006). The negative relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and grades were also stronger for men than women.

Replicability Over Time

Last, and relevant to the replicability of data over time, these findings are consistent with results reported by Pike (2000) and demonstrate the importance of student involvement and engagement to learning in college. Social science research is often scrutinized for its lack of replicability (Camerer et al., 2015). In researching the replicability of social science research, Camerer and colleagues found that of 21 studies, only 13 could yield similar findings in reproduction, with one researcher noting "a surprising number [of studies] that fail to replicate" (Harris, 2018). The replication of this current research underscores that fraternity and sorority involvement appears to yield positive outcomes, over time, in involvement and engagement both inside and outside the classroom.

Limitations

The study findings are limited to the items on the *College Student Report*. Research has consistently supported the adequacy and appropriateness of the items used by NSSE. Nevertheless, it is possible that surveys using different item sets could produce different results. More importantly, the results of this research show that membership in a fraternity or sorority is related to a variety of types of student involvement, engagement, and college outcomes. However, this research cannot answer questions regarding why or how fraternity/sorority membership is related to involvement, engagement, and outcomes. Additionally, qualitative research may reveal how fraternities and sororities involve, engage, and affect their members.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The findings of the current research have important implications for future research. Perhaps the most important implication is that more research is needed. While this research affirms the concepts of fraternity/sorority affiliation and involvement and engagement inside and outside the classroom, the "why" behind this has been an under-researched topic. In addition, given the strong positive relationships between fraternity/sorority membership and a broad array of engagement indicators, it is important to delve into the absence of positive relationships for two engagement indicators—Effective Teaching Practices and Quality of Interactions.

Another finding that deserves additional research is the positive relationship between membership in a fraternity or sorority and diversity experiences. Previous research has found that fraternities and sororities are less diverse and that members of fraternities and sororities interact less frequently with individuals who are different from themselves. Research is needed to better understand why the results of this study indicate fraternity/sorority members interact more frequently with individuals who are different than themselves. One possible explanation is that previous research focused on racial/ethnic diversity, whereas the definition of diversity was broader in this study (e.g., interacting with people from different race/ethnic groups, different religions, different political orientations, etc.). It is also possible that the positive relationships in the current research are an outgrowth of the strong community service orientations of fraternities and sororities. Understanding these results is critical for improving fraternity/sorority members' experiences with diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Unsurprisingly, fraternity/sorority membership is associated with higher levels of student engagement. It is less clear why membership in a fraternity or sorority is associated with lower grades. The generally negative relationship between grades and membership in a fraternity or sorority is particularly surprising, given the positive relationship between grades and student engagement (Kuh et al., 2006). Perhaps the negative effect on grades is the result of fraternity/sorority members becoming over-extended. Kuh et al. (1996) suggested that members of fraternities or sororities spend too much time in social activities and too little time in academic pursuits. This explanation does not appear to be appropriate for the findings of this study. Fraternity and sorority members reported higher levels of reflective and integrative learning, student-faculty interaction, and collaborative learning than independent students. If members of fraternities and sororities are becoming over-extended, they appear to be over-committed in academic areas.

The results of the current study also have important implications for the leadership of fraternal organizations, both on college campuses and in national organizations. First and foremost, this research indicates that fraternities and sororities are not antithetical to American higher education values. Fraternities and sororities appear to "walk their talk," encouraging students to become both academically and socially engaged and to value learning. That said, there are several opportunities to improve the fraternity/sorority experiences of college students. It is imperative that fraternal organizations, in cooperation with colleges and universities, take effective steps to address issues related to alcohol and other drug use and abuse, hazing, and sexual misconduct. These issues are not unique to fraternities and sororities. However, fraternities and sororities have become associated with these problems in the public's mind. Failure to address these issues will allow critics who advocate banning fraternities and sororities from college campuses to dominate the conversation (Biddix et al., 2014).

The results of this study also raise questions about deferring membership in a fraternity or sorority until the second semester or the second year of college. Fraternity/sorority membership had larger positive effects for first-year students on most engagement indicators, particularly Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction. First-year students also reported greater gains in learning than seniors. These findings are particularly important given that the quality of students' first-year experiences profoundly affects college success (Hunter, 2006). Even the negative relationship between fraternity/sorority membership and grades tended to be smaller for first-year students than seniors. Along this same vein, this study has powerful implications for college and university administrators as they consider both retention and graduation of students. At a time when student enrollment is on the precipice of steep decline (Grawe, 2018), fraternities and sororities provide a proven student retention tool. Moreover, related to deferring recruitment to the second semester of a student's first year or into sophomore year, such actions appear counterintuitive to higher education interests as involvement and engagement outcomes were even stronger for first-semester, first-year students than seniors. This statement does not suggest that harmful behaviors are overlooked; rather, if facing conduct of concern, administrators have an opportunity to focus on what is working in fraternal membership and address behavioral concerns through educational means. This is underscored by work in the area of system-wide suspensions or moratoriums, which are pauses in chapter operations. While popular among administrators, many would argue this type of sanctioning is antithetical to educational outcomes and has not been demonstrated to achieve desired outcomes. One study found that moratoriums on two campuses led to unintended consequences of eliminating those things that were working well within organizations and disrupting higher-risk behaviors for only a brief period of time and, perhaps, increasing overall higher-risk behaviors (Esquenazi, 2021). In other words, this type of sanctioning simply places students into the general population of students without actually addressing behaviors of concern.

Although the findings of this study do not appear to support system-wide suspensions or deferred recruitment, they do raise concerns about fraternity/sorority membership and academic performance (i.e., grades). One possible explanation for this negative relationship is that fraternity/sorority members become over-extended due to their high levels of curricular and co-curricular engagement. It may be worthwhile for national organizations and local chapters to consider using support systems similar to those provided for college athletes. Like college athletes, members of fraternities and sororities must deal with multiple demands on their time. The support systems developed to help athletes cope with and manage demands on their time may be useful for fraternity/sorority members (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). Given the positive influences of membership in a fraternity or sorority, poor academic performance must not offset those benefits.

CONCLUSION

All too often, it is taken for granted that fraternities and sororities are social organizations that do little to help their members succeed academically and thrive both in and out of class. The present research calls this conventional wisdom into question. Based on the findings of this study, fraternity, and sorority members are more involved and engaged in both curricular and co-curricular activities and report greater learning gains than students who are not members of fraternities or sororities. Although fraternity/sorority members report having lower grades than non-members, it does not appear that these lower grades are a result of a lack of effort in their academic studies. The plethora of studies about fraternities and sororities that focus on the use of alcohol and other drugs, hazing behaviors, and sexual misconduct are instructive for educators as they work with this sub-group of college students. Equally instructive are outcomes that assist educators in understanding positive outcomes related to fraternity and sorority life. Such outcomes, replicable over time and across large-scale data sets, are instructive to educators. Moving forward, colleges and universities, national organizations, and local fraternity/sorority chapters should address negative aspects of fraternity/sorority life so that students can more fully realize the many benefits of being a fraternity or sorority member.

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JCAPS

TWO STUDENT GOVERNMENTS, ONE UNIVERSITY: TRANSFORMATIVE ADVISING FOR STUDENT (RE)ENGAGEMENT AS COVID-19 PERSISTS

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This piece is presented from ongoing empirical research exploring barriers to student (re)engagement at a Midwestern university as COVID-19 persists. While college student personnel have worked to restore student life as campus operations have transitioned back in-person, college student engagement has struggled at many institutions across the United States. Taking a qualitative, phenomenological approach–with transformative leadership as a theoretical framework–this study revealed virtual exhaustion, student voice exclusion, and competing priorities as barriers to re-engaging with campus activities. This piece concludes with transformative advising as a possible approach for college student personnel to address these barriers alongside students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the higher education landscape (Saul, 2022; Cerullo, 2021). Academic and co-curricular programs deemed nonessential were moved to virtual delivery or canceled (Cerullo, 2021). Further, college students continuously reported exacerbated levels of fatigue working in isolation (Laskowski, 2021). College life today is not what many students dreamt of, and student organization advisors have struggled to re-engage students returning to campus. The institution serving as the site of this preliminary study was not exempt from the frequent transitions required by the pandemic.

Student involvement and campus life dwindled as the university transitioned back to in-person courses. As a small, private, STEM-focus, co-operative (co-op) university located in the Midwest with approximately 2,000 students, student involvement and campus life are critical in creating and sustaining "the pulse of the university," as described by the director of campus life. The purpose of this study is to examine how the student government advisor can re-engage student government leaders who have returned to campus as COVID-19 persists. The director of campus life and the student government advisor were interested in learning the possibilities and barriers related to student involvement from student perspectives and potential implications for advising practice.

The director of campus life and student government advisor sought strategies to reignite students' interest in campus involvement, but such efforts were not solely a result of the pandemic. Before the pandemic, the reputation and perception of student government were already unpopular, and their efforts were called into question by students and faculty alike.

> "What do they *really* do? They're all [members of Greek letter organizations], trying to boost their resumes…been that way since I got here."–3rd year student leader

> "It seems like they really wait for permission to do anything, which is different than what I remember when I started working here over 20 years ago. I hear often that student government is just a prop for the university administration to have their way with little student support or pushback."–Faculty member

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Student government's efforts were met with skepticism for years leading up to pandemic lockdown orders. The pandemic expedited their stagnation. It is important to note that this institution has two separate student government organizations due to the co-op makeup of the university. However, both have the same advisor and use the same funding sources, protocols, and operating procedures. As a co-op university, students are separated into two (2) groups–A and B. While Group A spends three (3) months taking courses (and being involved in student government), Group B is working with employers through intentional placements to gain "on-the-job" experience. Then, Groups A and B rotate for another three (3) months (and Group B is involved in student government). This process continues for two cycles, and at the end of the academic year, groups A and B have both spent six months in coursework and six months working. The director and advisor concluded that the organization needed to reimagine its mission, vision, goals, and perhaps its structure, but first, it should consider new advising approaches to assist students in the process. What should the advisor, the director, and the university do differently to support student government leaders? Before sharing the methodology and initial findings from this ongoing research study, a brief overview of relevant student government scholarship and student government advising is presented to contextualize the nature of this work, followed by an overview of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010, 2011, 2017) which serves as the theoretical framework for this investigation.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Student government organizations provide students with unique opportunities for leadership at macro and micro levels, a space to engage and reflect on student-centered concerns within the university, and opportunities for faculty and staff members to work conjunctively with student leaders to establish an environment where community members can thrive (Goodman, 2021b; May, 2010; Miles, 2010, 2011; Miles et al., 2008). Student government organizations serve as the official student voice to the administration and an avenue for certain student services (Hardaway et al., 2021; May, 2010; Miles et al., 2008; Templeton et al., 2018). Student government organizations are typically responsible for dealing with many essential student concerns, including but not limited to student apathy, organizational funding, and student programming and activities (Goodman, 2021a, 2022b; Goodman et al., 2021; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006; Miller & Nadler, 2006; Smith et al., 2016; Templeton et al., 2018). Considering the student government organization's challenges and makeup, the student leaders, advisors, and administrators aim to bridge a considerable gap across the campus community.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ADVISING

Student leader success requires shared participation, ongoing leadership training, and constructive feedback facilitated by skilled and dynamic advisors (Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993). These advisors must fully understand the student populations they serve and demonstrate proficiency in maximizing educational and developmental opportunities for their students (Cross, 1983). Consequently, the student government advisor plays a vital role in student government organizations' success and student government members' leadership development (Kuh, Schuh, & Witt, 1991; McKaig & Polciello, 1987; Rath, 2005). Several characteristics have been documented as successful approaches to advising student government organizations, including experience in extracurricular activities, credentials from student affairs graduate programs, sharing and making available information, accessing campus resources, promoting community engagement, and maintaining facilitative structures conducive to student voice (Boatman, 1988; 1998; Miles & Miller, 1997; Whipple & Murphy, 2004). The role of advisors is demanding and complex (Chaves, 1985).

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Transformative leadership (Shields, 2010, 2011, 2017) is the theoretical framework undergirding this study. Although eight (8) tenets of transformative leadership exist, only two (moral courage and the de- and re-construction of knowledge frameworks) are leveraged for this study.

Moral courage disrupts notions of correct or incorrect choices and focuses on achieving equitable outcomes for all members of an organization (Shields, 2010). Moral courage requires both realizations through critical

self-reflection (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018) and subsequently taking action (Shields, 2017). Often, such action must be taken during turbulent times when an organization's members seek a sense of normalcy. But what if challenges persist *because* of normalcy? As mentioned, the student government organization struggled with effectiveness and involvement before the pandemic began. The organization's struggles were only exacerbated by COVID-19 outcomes, making transformative leadership a viable framework for understanding how to lead and advise differently moving forward.

Moral courage and the de- and re-construction of knowledge frameworks are a dynamic duo. Advisors must do the self-work necessary to unpack biases, beliefs, and attitudes that shape knowledge construction, which can create possibilities or barriers to student success (Shields, 2020a; 2020b). Examining dispositions as advisors creates new pathways for shared knowledge construction with students. Student government is frequently cited among student voice and student agency scholarship (Benner et al., 2019) as key to achieving equity-aligned outcomes, particularly when advisors possess a critical lens.

Reconsidering the aforementioned characteristics of student government advisors, how much or how little of those characteristics can be applied to current circumstances? For instance, an active undergraduate experience in extracurricular activities can be helpful, but how does it harden knowledge frameworks? (Sheilds, 2020). The reflexive requirement of transformative leadership keeps advisors questioning, changing, and adapting their advising practice and leadership approach.

METHODS

This study explored the following two research questions: 1) From student perspectives, what are the possibilities and barriers to student government leaders' re-engagement on campus? 2) What are the possible implications for student government advising practice to re-engage student government leaders?

Investigating possibilities and barriers to student government leaders' re-engagement on campus and revealing implications for student government advising practice legitimizes using qualitative design, taking a phenomenological approach as data was collected and analyzed (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Sokolowski, 2000). Inquiry was driven by exploring student leaders' experiences within institutional structures and culture that influence their participation in student government and any efforts on behalf of campus personnel that might mitigate structures prohibiting their participation. This investigation considered student government leaders' experiences during shelter-in-place orders required by the pandemic and their return to campus as the COVID-19 pandemic persists. This design is also appropriate as the study explores a student government makeup that is peculiar, absent in previous studies, and involves more complicated interactions and experiences that are not easily captured through quantitative analysis.

Data for this study was collected via 29 virtual semi-structured qualitative interviews with student government leaders and two (2) focus group interviews with each student government administration–Group A and Group B (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Hoepfl, 1997; Vaughn et al., 1996). The student government advisor solicited participants. All interviews, individual and focus group, took place virtually via Zoom. Document analysis was also included in the data collection process to examine current policies, practices, and procedures within the organization's "social facts" or constitution, bylaws, and other government documents (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997; Bowen, 2009; Wong et al., 1982).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed to seek and identify common ideas or patterns in the data, resulting in themes and categories to relate the experiences of student government leaders involved at different times (Aronson, 1995; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Regarding document analysis, the organization's social facts were skimmed, read, and interpreted by finding, selecting, making meaning, and synthesizing information (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis and qualitative interviewing created a pathway for data collected in this study to seek convergence and corroboration, triangulating data and providing credibility (Eisner, 2017).

Finally, regarding data analysis and interpretation, a trusted critical friend with a knowledge base and related experiences acted as professional support and provided ongoing feedback to mitigate bias (Costa & Kallick, 1993). As information was shared with the critical friend, identifying information was omitted to protect participant confidentiality.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Findings from focus groups indicated students felt exhausted from virtual engagement, excluded from institutional decision-making, and competing priorities between Group A and Group B student government administrations.

Virtual Exhaustion

All interviews emphasized a deep desire to reignite campus life and take action both on campus and within the local community. Stress, exhaustion, and burnout due to the pandemic caused involvement to become "low on students' priority lists." Student leaders felt that "everything is really stressful and overwhelming right now. We're constantly plugged in."

> "I really want to get back involved and make the most of my college experience, I'm just exhausted with how overwhelming and stressful this all is. No one really knows what's going on, and the work keeps piling up. It feels harder to get anything more done right now, so adding student government activities back to my plate is a lot."–Student leader

Increased stress aligns with reports of increased stress among college students, broadly due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Michigan Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, n.d.). Students named contending with "Zoom fatigue" (Steele, 2022) and ongoing uncertainty creating the perfect storm for disengagement. Some courses were in person during the transition back to campus, while others continued on Zoom.

> "Zoom kills my energy–doesn't matter if it's all day or even half a day–it tires me out. It's even harder when some of my classes meet on Zoom, and some are in person on the same day. By the end of the day, I'm drained."–Student leader

Student Voice Exclusion

None of the university's COVID plans included student voices. Due to virtual learning, the university seemed to double down on punitive policies related to academic (dis)honesty as it invested in plagiarism technology that was quickly implemented across academic programs.

> "I logged into class one day, and the professor started going over this new mandatory upload system for our work. All of our work had to be submitted through the system for it to be graded. [The university] doesn't do anything fast, so I wondered how did this happen so quickly? We still use the system now that classes are back in person or like a mixed delivery."–Student leader

> "No one really asked if [students] were okay, you know? It was like, very business as usual, except here's another process to follow."–Student leader

From student leaders' perspectives, the university was less concerned about safety from COVID-19 and more concerned about the university's "academic reputation." Student leaders' voices were unheard, and students conceded that the pandemic placed them at a significant disadvantage in taking action. Their exclusion left students feeling particularly disenfranchised, especially given their roles as leaders of their peers.

Competing Priorities

Finally, being a co-op university with an uncommon academic calendar compounds COVID-19 challenges. Such a calendar composition led to the creation of two separate student government organizations within one. Having dual student government organizations raises many questions regarding student government's impact across campus and the advisor's ability to advise two separate organizations. The dual student government organizations create competing, confusing, and contradictory priorities.

> "They [student government group B] don't have to do as much but get all the same benefits and access."–Student government leader, Group A

> "Dividing up funds can be hard depending on the time of the year because even the weather matters. More activities happen when the weather is nicer. So, [student government in] fall months do more and get more funding sometimes than [student government in] winter months. This puts one group at a disadvantage, especially if funds go unused. It makes us look like we aren't doing anything when it's cold."–Student government leader, Group B

Along with advising dual student government organizations, this advisor is also responsible for advising community service learning and students involved in sorority/fraternity life who often intersect with student government. There is no additional compensation for these added advising efforts.

> "It's not ideal for one person to advise all of these groups. I really have to make sure I'm being fair to everyone, but fairness is not always equitable. [These organizations] need something different all the time, and it's difficult to be consistent even though the university has policies and procedures set in stone."–Student government advisor

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVISING PRACTICE: TRANSFORMATIVE ADVISING

COVID-19 has revealed and exacerbated countless challenges across the higher education landscape. As colleges and universities have struggled with aspects of campus operations, students have even questioned their ability to complete their degrees (Smalley, 2020). Concurrently, students have always played a pivotal role in social change in higher education through activism and advocacy (Quaye et al., 2022). During this moment in history, higher education institutions could be missing another opportunity to work side-by-side with students to respond collectively. In particular, institutions can rely on and activate their student government(s) as a source of leadership through challenging times. Student government organizations are primed to address challenges directly, representing one pathway to garnering student voice. Given the student government context at this particular institution and the advisor's charge to address virtual exhaustion, student voice exclusion, and competing priorities, there is an opportunity for advisors to lead transformatively. Acting as a transformative advisor (Barnett, 2019) draws from transformative leadership (Sheilds, 2010, 2011, 2017, 2020), proactive advising (Canon, 2013; Varney, 2012), and critical self-reflection (Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016), which are critical skills for advisors and institutional leaders.

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership calls for bold strokes through a mandate for deep and equitable change (Montoui & Donnelly, 2018; Shields, 2010, 2011, 2017) and through moral courage to engage in critical self-reflection informing leadership actions (Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields, 2020a, 2020b). At the organizational level, dual student government administrations, not frequently emphasized in student government scholarship, call for the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks to guide the group's efforts toward change (Shields, 2010, 2011, 2017).

Moral courage is required for individual change and to change systems and structures that do not serve community needs (Shields, 2020). The director and advisor were courageous in investing resources to support student government leaders in ways not previously done. Both the director and advisor recognized challenges and thought of ways to change the course of the organization. After lobbying the vice president of student affairs and presenting sobering information on the status of involvement across campus life, including the findings from the focus group interviews, the vice president agreed to fund a leadership development program for all student organizations. The director and advisor needed help and asked for it, which demonstrates the first step in leading transformatively and primes student leaders to do the same.

Attention to advancing equity under transformative leadership and understanding the perspectives and challenges students face is necessary for an advisor's success. Through a proactive advising approach, advisors are accountable to students' voices. Further, a transformative advisor continuously grapples with how their dispositions weigh

heavily on their ability to work with students (Shields, 2017). As advisors engage in transformative leadership development, so should their students, as the practice of promise and critique applies individually and organizationally. Everyone involved in the work had to change for the student government organization to change.

Proactive Advising

Although used within academic advising contexts, proactive advising bodes well for relationship-building between student leaders and advisors. It is essential to be "intrusive without intruding" while being honest about opportunities and challenges (Cannon, 2013, p. 1). The more information an advisor has, the more specific they can be in meeting student needs and cultivating growth and development as leaders. Proactive advisors ask pointed, detailed, and open-ended questions to build connections (Cannon, 2013). According to Varney (2012), proactive advising involves (a) deliberately intervening to enhance student motivation, (b) showing interest and involvement with students, (c) advising in ways designed to increase student success, (d) educating students on options, and (e) approaching students before situations develop. In the student government context, this might mean advisors share student concerns with administrators, especially if students cannot access such spaces. This also means anticipating students' needs, even if students are not explicitly naming them, and identifying areas for growth. For example, advisors can assist students in understanding how identity intersects with student government across race (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Hardaway et al., 2021; Mills, 2020), gender (Workman et al., 2020), sexuality (Goodman, 2021b, 2022a), socioeconomic status (Houze, 2021), and more.

Critical Self-Reflection

Finally, self-reflection is critical to achieving transformative advising. Khalifa et al. (2016) present critical self-reflection within the culturally responsive leadership framework. Khalifa et al. (2016) reported on self-reflection as key in a leader's personal growth as it "unearths personal biases, assumptions, and values that stem from personal backgrounds" (p. 1285). Critical self-reflection is transformative (Cooper, 2009; Shields, 2010). This means that the advisor must develop a critical consciousness to advise students through their work and advocate knowledgeably and intentionally on their behalf.

In conjunction with the literature and findings of this study, transformative advising has the potential to be adopted as a critical advising approach for advisors working with student government organizations through complex challenges.

CONCLUSION

As COVID-19 challenges continue, the student government organization has committed to interrogating its purpose for membership and deciding on the type of organization it wants to be. Students have examined organizational impediments and began working towards mitigating them. For instance, the executive board members examined demographic data about their members, including race, class, gender, and income. COVID has required many students to make challenging decisions regarding their collegiate and work lives. Stated plainly, some students cannot afford to be involved on campus. The executive board members learned that students more likely to join either group of the student government organization were more likely to come from high-income backgrounds that did not require them to work while attending college, consistent with prior student government scholarship (e.g., see Houze, 2021).

Incentives, including compensation, have been considered to garner a more critical and accurate student voice for equity-focused leadership. More scholarship is needed in campus activities and practice to account for compositions like the one described in this preliminary study. However, there is limited time for student government advisors to write about their work (Kane, 2019). As mentioned, the advisor in this study has to split time between student government groups A and B, Sorority/Fraternity Life, and community service-learning programs. What should the institution do differently to support advisors and honor (and compensate) them for their time? Still, this research provides a necessary snapshot into how transformative advising can assist advisors in addressing challenges exacerbated by the pandemic and cause scholars to re-examine area student affairs practices that go overlooked.

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JCAPS

BUILDING SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE

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The purpose of this case study was to understand how attending an undergraduate academic conference contributes to a student's sense of belonging, not only within their institution but also in the larger academic community. This research was informed by the literature on club participation in conferences and faculty/student connections. Through in-depth interviews with three community college students and observational data collected throughout a four-day conference, their engagement with each other and with students from other colleges was explored. The findings include the faculty's role as a catalyst for student involvement, the growth of within-group dynamics, increased student appreciation for their college, and increased involvement of students in the academic community.

Every spring, I agonize over the mounds of paperwork required to bring students to an undergraduate academic conference. Colleagues often ask me why I go through the headache to make this happen, and I've struggled to find an easy answer. Instead, I can reflect on the students who befriended their colleagues from a four-year school and planned a round table together for the next year. Or I think about the joy on a student's face when she won a writing award. Sometimes I laugh remembering a student commenting that the session he attended was fine but "all they did was read their papers." Yes, that's what we do at conferences. Sometimes I grimace at the challenges of travel, like the time we sat together in an emergency room after a car accident. How can I capture these memories and the students' sense of belonging that stems from them?

The purpose of this research was to understand how attending an undergraduate academic conference, specifically the Sigma Kappa Delta/Sigma Tau Delta (SKD/STD) conference, contributes to a student's sense of belonging. The SKD/STD conference is somewhat unique in that it brings together English majors from both community colleges and four-year colleges/universities. SKD is the English honor society for community colleges, and STD is the English honor society for four-year colleges and universities. To make conference attendance affordable, the institution pays for all aspects of the students' travel. Most of the community college students who attended this conference plan to later enroll at a four-year college or university after they earn their associate degree; although, many of them do not plan to pursue English after they transfer. For the purpose of this research, the students who participated in this study are from one community college and attended the 2023 SKD/STD conference.

The central research question of this study was: How does attending an academic conference contribute to a community college student's sense of belonging? In this research, I utilized Tinto's (2012) model of student retention and critical student development theory (Jones, 2019).

RELEVANT LITERATURE

In this literature review, I define a sense of belonging and summarize the current research on student participation in clubs and conferences, including access to these opportunities for students with limited financial means, and the impact of faculty-student connection through extra-curricular activities. For the purpose of this research, the definition of sense of belonging comes from Strayhorn (2019), who defines this as "perceived social

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support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community" (p. 4). This sense of belonging includes social and academic integration that a student experiences and that influences a student to remain in college (Tinto, 2012). Students experience social integration through membership in clubs and organizations as well as through the development of their social circle. Students develop academic integration through their coursework and relationships with faculty and staff (Tinto, 2012). Through this study, I expand on this definition through the research participants' experiences.

Existing research on student engagement with clubs and conferences shows promising results for students' sense of belonging and, therefore, their social and academic integration. Strayhorn's (2019) research demonstrates a connection between student club participation and sense of belonging. This research found that the more involved students are with campus organizations, the greater their sense of belonging. This increased sense of belonging did not just come from student-student interactions but was also demonstrated in student-faculty interactions (Strayhorn, 2019). Specifically, Strayhorn (2019) identified four ways that club membership increases sense of belonging: shared interests and values, familiarity with the campus, a sense of membership, and feeling that they matter.

O'Connor et al.'s (2022) research also demonstrates the impact of club membership and conference travel. Their research focused on the Campus Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) students attending a CAMP conference. They found that students felt that their identities were reflected through conference presentations. Students also formed stronger bonds with other conference attendees, felt a greater sense of belonging at their college, and found a greater sense of belonging in their degree program. This study also found that students felt legitimized in their chosen field and experienced strengthened academic interests. This led to a greater interest in giving back to their college and larger communities. However, these effects were most prevalent when the student was supported by a group environment before and after the conference. Attending a conference as a one-off event, meaning there were no group activities before or after the conference, did not guarantee this impact (O'Connor et al., 2022).

Recognizing the financial burden yet benefits of student travel, Dean and Kelly's (2020) research focused on providing travel opportunities to students who are less likely to be able to afford the out-of-pocket costs. They applied for and received institutional funding to take first-generation students on an educational trip. After travel, the students reported a stronger sense of identity and closer relationships with the other students and the faculty with whom they traveled (Dean & Kelly, 2020). This research demonstrates the positive outcomes that can occur when accessibility to these programs is increased through financial assistance. Whatley and Stich (2021) studied the inclusivity of study abroad programs, another travel opportunity that can have a high cost. They discovered that when financial assistance was available and advertised to students, cost was not the determining factor as to whether or not a student would participate (Whatley & Stich, 2021). Although there might be several reasons why a student chooses not to travel, addressing cost is the first step.

The impact travel has on student-faculty connection is also demonstrated through research by Kirby and Thomas (2022). Their research indicated that faculty who show students they care and connect with students create a greater sense of connection for those students. This does not just apply to their sense of connection with faculty, but also extends to their sense of connection with their peers (Kirby & Thomas, 2022).

The existing literature establishes the context for this study. Student sense of belonging was defined, and the impacts of club membership and travel, especially when made feasible for students less likely to afford to do so, were explored. This study seeks to better understand how faculty taking club members to an academic conference, with travel paid for by the institution, impacted the students' sense of belonging.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach I used in this research is a case within a case study (Stake, 1995) utilizing Tinto's (2012) model of student retention and critical student development theory (Jones, 2019) as its theoretical lens.

Methodological Framework: Case Within a Case Study

This study is based on Stake's (1995) approach to case study research. He pulls from a variety of qualitative methodologies to ground case studies on issues, especially concerning education. In focusing on issues rather than problems, Stake (1995) argues that the researcher is a more neutral observer because the focus is not on what is problematic. As an observer, I was also able to engage more collaboratively with the research participants to draw assertions from both the interpretations I created and the ones the research participants created. Furthermore, because case study research occurs in a bounded system (Jones et al., 2014), I was able to deeply explore the case that I studied to more fully understand how academic conference attendance connects with a student's sense of belonging.

Each research participant demonstrated their own case within the larger case. The larger case was bounded in that it focused on students from one community college who attended the SKD/STD conference in the spring of 2023. This was a four-day conference that consisted of panel presentations of undergraduate research in literature and original creative writing. In addition to the creative writing and research panels, there are workshops for students to network with each other, keynote speakers, organized fun activities, and award presentations. Using Stake's (1995) case-within-case approach allowed me to deeply explore each individual case and then draw themes from those cases and the larger case.

Theoretical Perspective: Student Retention and Critical Student Development Theory

Despite the motivations behind a student's decision to go to college, they might not achieve their educational goals. This can be especially true at public community colleges, where the national retention rate is 61% versus the 82% (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.) of public four-year colleges and universities. Tinto's (2012) model explores what influences a student's departure from their institution. He argues that students enter college with a variety of experiences and backgrounds, and they have at least some degree of commitment to their educational goals. Experiences in college can weaken or strengthen those commitments. This is not forgetting, though, that students also have a life outside of college. When a student's college integration (socially and academically) is weaker, those external forces might pull a student away from their education and toward other goals (Tinto, 2012). This research examined how conference attendance might impact a student's sense of belonging, which can be reflected through this idea of integration.

Student development theory (Jones, 2019) also examines how students create a sense of belonging throughout their educational journey. There have been several waves of student development theory, but the second and third waves are the most applicable to studying sense of belonging. The second wave of student development theory focused on the development of a student's social identity, sense of belonging, and understanding of the self (Jones, 2019). The third wave built on this by adding that students who develop in the ways established by the second wave can then move on to create social change (Jones, 2019); in other words, the third wave adds a critical approach to student development theory. Stewart and Brown's (2019) research reinforces this idea by showing that as students destabilize their existing identities and create new ones, they are positioned to dismantle oppressive systems.

Participants

Five students from the community college of interest attended the 2023 SKD/STD conference in Denver, Colorado. I used purposeful sampling (Jones et al., 2014) by inviting all five students to participate. On the first day of the conference, I met with the group to explain my research and handed out informed consent forms. I instructed them to read the form carefully, reach out to me with any questions, and return the signed form to me by the end of the conference if they were interested in participating. Of the five students, three self-selected to participate. All three research participants are members of SKD. Membership in this honor society requires a 3.0 GPA, A's in English and literature classes, and at least 15 college-level credit hours earned. Their pseudonyms and demographic data are as follows.

Nicole. Nicole is a 29-year-old white woman who has attended college off and on. She began her studies in 2010 but stopped out to consider different career paths. She re-enrolled in 2020 to complete the prerequisites for the

radiology technician program, which she began full-time in the Fall 2023 semester.

Renee. Renee is a 37-year-old white woman who attended the community college full-time for two years. She is a member of a bridge program that connects community college students to a university. In the Spring 2023 semester, she began her studies in elementary education at the university.

Rose. Rose is a 23-year-old Hispanic woman who has attended the community college part-time for one year. She is also a member of the bridge program but has not yet begun university classes. She is an English major and plans to attend law school after earning her bachelor's degree in English.

Data Collection and Analysis

These data were collected through observational research as well as semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Jones et al., 2014; Stake, 1995). I attended the four-day conference with the participants and journaled my observations of the group and the conference at the end of each day. Although my initial observations focused on the entire group, only observations regarding the students who submitted their consent forms were used in this research. The research participants were encouraged to seek out presentations and sections of the conference that interested them, but there were several opportunities for us all to be together.

The week after the conference, I scheduled Zoom interview sessions with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and focused on questions I had prepared in advance as well as follow-up questions that arose from our conversations. I recorded the interviews on Zoom and immediately transcribed them using Otter AI. Afterward, I emailed each participant a copy of their transcript as well as some of my initial thoughts regarding the themes that emerged. This email exchange allowed me to also seek further clarification about anything brought up in the interview (Stake, 1995).

I analyzed these data using direct interpretation, which involved thinking deeply about the case and watching it closely (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). This direct interpretation was based on a search for patterns, which Stake (1995) defines as "consistency within certain conditions" (p. 78). By reflecting on my observations as well as the interview data, I identified codes and then established themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

The primary way I created trustworthiness for this study was through member checking (Stake, 1995). I shared the transcripts and initial findings with the research participants and invited their feedback. I also protected my participants' ability to decline participation by recruiting them privately for the study and not discussing the research in group meetings. The participants also signed a consent form, at which point they were reminded that they could remove themselves from the study at any time and that no one else in the group would know if they participated. They were invited to choose their preferred name or pseudonym (Lahman, 2018) to help protect their privacy. Furthermore, no participants were aware that I would be thanking them with an Amazon gift card until after the data collection was completed. Additionally, I compared my findings with other descriptions of the phenomenon to theoretically triangulate (Stake, 1995) my results, and gathering observational data along with interview data allowed me to use data source triangulation (Stake, 1995). Finally, I reflexively journaled (Jones et al., 2014) throughout the research process to record my thoughts, biases, and assumptions, which are also shared in this manuscript through my research stance. Throughout this study, I also sought feedback from a qualitative methodologist.

Researcher Stance

I have advised this chapter of SKD for more than a decade. When I restarted the chapter, I designed it with access in mind. Rather than only allowing students who achieve membership in SKD, I created a two-tiered system that invited any student to be involved at the club level with the idea that the support they found in the club would help them see themselves as honors students and eventually earn honors status. Therefore, I am closely connected with the club historically, and I spend several hours with club members weekly. Additionally, one of

the research participants was enrolled in one of my classes during this research process. As a researcher, I wanted to explore if the community I anecdotally see could be demonstrated with data.

FINDINGS

This section introduces the findings from interviews and observational data for each of the smaller cases: Nicole, Renee, and Rose. This will be followed by observational data from the larger case.

Nicole

Nicole has been a member of this SKD chapter for two years, so this was her second time attending the conference. Reflecting on preparing for her second conference, Nicole said, "Going for the second time, I knew what to expect, and I felt like I was much more involved than the first year in the conference." Nicole's first conference was in Atlanta, and the distance from the college dictated that the group fly there together. This year, the conference was close enough to drive, and Nicole opted to ride in the school van to the conference hotel.

The conference sessions started the next day, and Nicole attended a session on language's impact on attitudes. While attending this session, Nicole met Amy, a university student and member of STD who was alone at the conference. Nicole wanted to support Amy since it was Amy's first time at the conference.

> "It kind of seems like she was a little lost. She was going to the same place I was, and I was just kind of like, come with me. I introduced her to my roommate and invited her out and about." - Nicole

After this first encounter, Amy became an adopted member of the group, joining us for meals and other events and sessions that were not specific to SKD. Despite Nicole saying that she has never been a fan of poetry, she attended almost every session that featured original poetry. She was able to connect with the poetry through some struggles in her personal life.

> "The LGBTQ+ community ones hit home for me, having my life situation, you know, outside of school where my younger brother came out by attempting suicide, and also the grief and loss and depression poetry hit home too for the same reason." - Nicole

These poetry sessions, along with some that she attended on publishing, encouraged Nicole to take up writing again after the conference. "I have not stopped writing and have just been blowing up my new journal. So, I feel like I'm trying to be more creative when I'm writing, and I feel, like, just super inspired."

Renee

This was also Renee's second year in SKD and second time attending the conference. She served as the chapter's president even after transferring mid-year to a university. Renee opted to drive herself to the conference because she was not sure if she would have to return to school, mid-conference, to take an exam. Renee also reflected on having a better idea of what to expect when attending the conference for the second time.

> "I knew that I would have opportunities to, like, seek out new people that wrote. I knew that I would be able to, like, connect with other students, and…gain new insights to things and be able to ask questions." - Renee

There were some differences in this year's conference, though, that Renee also reflected on. Her previous conference experience was the first year the conference was held post COVID-19 lockdowns, which impacted both attendance and policies around travel and masking. "A big difference was, you could feel in, like, the hotels. You could feel the difference between post-COVID and further out, post-COVID." Renee explained that at her first conference, "We were still told within the conference to wear masks and there was still, like, that fear and rigidity."

Other differences were apparent when attending SKD-specific sessions. There had been shifts in the organization's leadership that impacted some of the smoothness of their events. "It just seemed, like, a little bit more

chaotic within them than it did the first year. I could tell that they were kind of scrambling, but it worked out. Everything was fine. I just felt badly for them." Despite some disorganization, Renee was glad to reconnect with a member of SKD whom she met at the previous conference. "I think of him as my nephew…so my nephew from Alabama. I'm invested in his future, and I felt, like, so proud of him because he's achieving so well."

Rose

This was Rose's first year in SKD and first time attending the conference. She also decided to drive herself because she needed to leave the conference early for work. Despite being her first time at an academic conference, Rose was prepared for what the conference would be like. "I think I expected it to be exactly what it was like. I expected meeting different people for sure, which we did. I did imagine maybe a little bit more like a classroom setting, not as open as it was."

Despite these expectations, one of the sessions that Rose attended led her to an "existential crisis." Rose reflected on attending this session on imposter syndrome and the impact it had on her.

> "I started to question, like, these are all people who read academic journals, write them, and help with them, and read all these classics, and they talk about all these authors. I haven't read, like, 90 percent of these things. I just started to question, am I a natural English major." – Rose.

After this session, Rose discussed it with other chapter members and her faculty advisors. Eventually, she felt better about the direction she was headed in.

> "Everyone's a little different, and Renee brought that up a little bit. And it helps me talking to you and also Lila, who kind of helped remind me just, you want to pursue law. It's very different from what a lot of these people are doing. You're not looking to become a teacher. If that changes, so be it, but as of right now, law is where you're headed." - Rose

Despite her "existential crisis," Rose submitted creative work to the SKD writing contests to "get over the fear of submitting." She did not win; however, this inspired Rose to work harder for next year's conference. "It made me actually want to take the time to write something that would be better for the chances of winning."

The Larger Case

Despite not arriving at the conference together, the participants were eager to join up in the hotel lobby before finding a group dinner. This was especially shown through Rose opting for street parking in order to join the group quickly, not wanting to arrange for hotel parking until later. We walked down the street to a restaurant that Renee chose and stayed for hours before returning to the hotel with a tentative plan for the next day.

Even with a tentative plan, Nicole texted the group first thing in the morning to make sure that she would not miss the SKD student panel scheduled for that day. The text soon developed into a discussion of all of the sessions they were looking forward to. After I shared where I would be going, Rose texted back, "I knew you'd go to that one!" With that, everyone left for their chosen sessions. Shortly before lunch, Nicole found me and asked if she could bring a student who was not with our group. I assured her that it was fine if the student's advisor knew where she was. We gathered once more in the lobby and walked across the street to grab sandwiches that we could bring back to the hotel/conference center. While we ate, the planning of the afternoon sessions began. The group broke apart for afternoon sessions with a plan to meet at a nice restaurant for dinner. Once again, Nicole brought her new friend, and we took group pictures before calling it a night.

The next day was the SKD awards ceremony. Unfortunately, we did not arrive early enough to claim a table together and ended up spread around the room. As soon as we found our seats, Rose texted the group, "Miss you guys!" Renee responded, "I know!! But yay cheesecake!" They seemed unhappy to not be seated together, but they also appeared engaged in conversations with students from other schools. Our chapter of SKD won the Chapter of the Year Award, and more group pictures were taken with it. The group broke apart once again to attend a variety of sessions, but we decided to join up in the evening for literary trivia hosted by the conference. Unfortunately, Rose could not join us for the trivia night as she had to leave the conference, return home, and work the next morning.

On the final morning of the conference, I arranged for luggage storage and made sure that everyone was checked out of their rooms with luggage safely stowed. This took long enough that I missed the morning sessions. The STD awards luncheon followed, and the group did not want to deal with being separated again. We stalked the ballroom doors and raced for an empty table as soon as we were allowed in. We chose a table to the back because, as is our tradition, we eat the fancy meal and leave before the STD awards. Nicole's family brought her son into the city, so she left to take him to the zoo rather than ride in the school van back to campus with us.

Themes Found in the Data

Through the analysis of the smaller cases and the larger case, four themes emerged: faculty as a catalyst for involvement, within-group dynamics, appreciation for college support and connection, and the effects of encountering the larger academic community.

Faculty As a Catalyst for Involvement. All the participants spoke of joining the group after one of their faculty members discussed it with them. This conversation was initiated by a faculty member in two of the cases. For Nicole and Rose, this opportunity sounded exciting because they wanted to be with like-minded individuals. Nicole explained, "when my English teacher recommended this honor society to me, it felt, like, really cool, you know, that there was a group of people that were similar to and what I like to do." Rose described her decision to participate in the group by saying,

> "Lila reached out to me after, I think, I took her Intro to Lit class. It was just really cool because I had done, like, debate club in high school …[but] I hadn't had that experience in college, so when the opportunity presented itself, I was very excited because I never got to do anything within English."

Faculty starting the conversation about joining was the catalyst for both Nicole and Rose's membership in the group.

Renee is a student who is highly motivated to join organizations on campus. She has been involved with two other honors organizations but still benefited from a conversation with her faculty member.

> "I saw a little bookmark or something that had information on it. I was like, oh yeah, I want to try to do that. And it took me forever to actually get into it. And then I spoke to Lila about it, and she was just like, it doesn't matter, because I thought I had missed the ball because I didn't go in the beginning. She's like, just start coming."

Lila, who was mentioned in two of the participants' comments about joining SKD, is also a faculty advisor of this chapter of SKD and attended the SKD conference. Lila facilitated much of the travel arrangements for the conference, including driving a school van to the conference location and arranging the shared hotel rooms. Renee reflected on the hotel room arrangements and how the faculty advisors give chapter members freedom.

> "You take the time to get to know us, and you're sensitive to our own wants … you are, like, attuned to the people around you. Instead of, like, you're with this person or you're with that person. You were very good about making sure that we felt that we belonged but also having the freedom to, within standards, to do whatever we wanted."

Rose also reflected on her relationships with the faculty advisors. "Lila's very good [at literary trivia]. You're very different in your English, and I've loved it. I loved experiencing from you and from Lila, how different you both are with the way you teach English. It's refreshing."

Renee was able to reach out for support from faculty advisors during the conference. On the third day of the conference, Renee explained that she was having some worrying health issues, and Lila took her to urgent care. Afterward, Renee and I sat down to discuss some of the events in her personal life that are causing her stress. Renee felt comfortable reaching out to the faculty advisors to seek support when it was needed.

All three participants demonstrated that connections with faculty were a central reason for them joining SKD and reflected positively on the relationships they continued to build with faculty through membership in the group and through conference attendance.

Within-Group Dynamics

All the participants felt positive about the group before and after the conference, but they also shared how attending the conference strengthened those bonds.

Before Conference. Renee and Nicole had both attended the conference the year before, but I asked them to reflect on their sense of belonging before their first conference experience. For Renee, attending the conference allowed her to meet other group members in person for the first time since, at that time, meetings were being held exclusively on Zoom.

> "I was one of the first people at the airport…and I happened to glance up and I was like, oh, I think I know her. It wasn't until they actually started to cluster together that I was like, oh, that's my group."

Despite not having met other group members in person before this moment, she reflected that she felt connected. "I think that I had only attended maybe four meetings before…[but] I always felt comfortable." Nicole also said that she felt connected to the group before attending the conference. "This club was a really good, like, support system for me." She also reflected that she had not felt as active in the group as she would like to be but said, "I still feel like there's a sense of support system with the club."

Rose held the strongest sense of connection with the group before the conference despite this being her first time traveling with the group. "It's been my little safety net…we just talk and it's a safe place." Rose is also the only participant who joined the group after meetings resumed in person rather than on Zoom, which could explain her stronger sense of connection before attending the conference.

After Conference. Nicole and Renee both felt a stronger connection with the group after attending the conference. Renee felt that the group membership established at the conference carried over into her relationships with group members after attending.

> "It was like the whole time together were able to attend discussions and hear our frustrations or realize maybe all of us didn't view something a specific way…or I thought I was the only one thinking that way about some piece of work, but then I realized, oh my gosh, like we all think that way too. So finding our commonalities…helped me."

Nicole said that attending the conference, "kind of bonded all of the other group members and myself a little bit more." This was also apparent at the conference when Nicole shared with the group the struggles occurring in her personal life. The group members took time to sit with her, listen to what was going on, and offer help where they could.

Despite Rose describing that she felt strong relationships before and after the conference, she also reflected on how those relationships were deepened by the conference experience. Even though she said, "it couldn't have gotten better. I think it's been great from the start," she also said that after the conference, "we know what's going on with each other's lives." Rose also sought group support after her "existential crisis" and found a great deal of comfort in the responses she got from the group members.

Not only did Rose express a strong connection to this group, but attending the conference led her to be more invested in the group's future. She reflected that she had struggled in her first attempt at college, but that the group "has been one of the things that I have loved so much." She added that she wants to see the group "flourish just a little bit more before I go and then hopefully leave it in the hands of a few other people who love it just as much." She was given the choice to graduate in a semester or an academic year, and she decided to stay for the next academic year in order to hold a leadership position in the group.

Appreciation for College Connection and Support

The participants' appreciation for their college came from a sense of connection and support. Renee said that the college has a welcoming atmosphere where, "anybody who wants to do this, come in." Nicole enjoyed learning about other ways to be involved on campus because group members are also doing other things at the college. This networking, "open[s] the doors for me to get more involved with other things." One of these new opportunities came in the form of a job opportunity for Rose. Rose got to know the student affairs office as she worked on the paperwork for conference travel. One of the staff members in that office offered her a work-study position for the next year.

Attending the conference also led Renee to appreciate the financial support that the college offers for conference travel. She said that the college "is more invested in getting students involved than worried about checking boxes." She was referencing the funding the students received to attend the conference. Renee reflected on how the students from other colleges had to work hard to get the funds and stated, "just how well off we have it… [the college does] so much for their students."

Effects of Encountering the Larger Academic Community

All the research participants enjoyed getting to know students from different schools. Nicole enjoyed getting to "really talk more in-depth with someone from another school." Renee also enjoyed finding common ground with students from across the country. When reflecting on hearing other students' work presented at the conference, she said that "it's hard not to find, like, some kind of connection with them." This is even true when Renee held different conclusions or viewpoints from the speakers. She said, "I think that it's important to connect with people who are within kind of the same wheelhouse mentally but have a completely different viewpoint." Rose also enjoyed hearing differing experiences presented through student work. "Everyone's was very different in their perspective." After hearing the variety of student presentations, Rose has decided to work hard to submit her work to present at next year's conference. She said that "after seeing it in person, it feels a lot better, like, I could definitely do it."

At the SKD awards luncheon, the research participants were not able to sit together. They were spread out among conference attendees from a variety of SKD chapters. Although they were nervous about this at first, Rose reflected that she enjoyed meeting different chapters, especially one chapter from Alabama. The "infamous Alabama chapter," as Rose put it, always does well with awards and is seen as our chapter's greatest competition. Although our chapter took home five awards at this conference, the group members were eager to do even better next year.

DISCUSSION

Social and academic integration (Tinto, 2012) were demonstrated by the research findings. The research participants discussed how connected they felt with other members of the group and the faculty sponsors. This demonstrates findings in line with O'Connor et al.'s (2022) research that conference attendance alone does not create social and academic integration. The connection built among group members along with their faculty advisors is an important part of creating integration and sense of belonging through conference attendance. This suggests that faculty or staff who want to encourage student participation at academic conferences should, at the very least, create a group for those students to meet and bond before the conference and reflect together after the conference. Furthermore, a sense of connection with faculty or staff advisors creates stronger academic integration (Tinto, 2012) and sense of connection (Kirby & Thomas, 2022), which means that the faculty or staff who are arranging conference travel should be involved with the group and travel to the conference if they can.

Whether or not a group is formed to support conference attendance, the findings do demonstrate that attending an undergraduate academic conference can help students discover their identity (Jones, 2019) in the larger academic culture and be prepared to participate in academic conversations. Community college students can have voices that are often left out of the conversations happening in their academic field. Lifting these voices can be a core part of social change (Jones, 2019). The research participants felt more comfortable submitting their work to the conference after attending one because they could better visualize what happens at an academic

conference. Colleges should promote conference attendance early in a student's academic career to foster more involvement in the larger academic community later. Faculty and staff can find a wide selection of undergraduate conferences focused on different subjects, as well as general undergraduate conferences like the one hosted by Phi Theta Kappa each year. This research demonstrates that requiring students to submit work to the conference before being allowed to attend might limit those who are less sure of what conferences are and do not know what to expect at them. Encouraging conference attendance can increase the variety of student voices in these academic conversations.

However, attending academic conferences can be a challenge for community college students if funding is not made available. When looking at data for the larger case, students from one community college, the majority of these students (73%) receive financial aid according to the school's IPEDS data. This means that the likelihood of community college students being able to fund the costs of plane tickets, hotel rooms, and conference registration is less likely. Furthermore, community college students might face additional costs due to travel that add to the financial strain. Both Renee and Nicole, for example, are single mothers who needed to arrange childcare during their absence. Removing some, if not all, of the financial burden of traveling to a conference can make it far more likely for community college students to attend. Colleges should make such funding available to students. Those who wish to find funding for their students to attend conferences can speak to the benefits of conference attendance.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were some limitations to this study, which created opportunities for further research. The first limitation is that the data collection was done by the group's advisor. Although this group has a tight-knit and trusting relationship, the power dynamic created through my role as both researcher and advisor cannot be ignored. Further research should be done on this topic by a researcher who can avoid, as much as possible, any power dynamics that could affect the data that is collected.

A second limitation of this study is the sample size. Due to my role as the group's advisor, I was careful not to unfairly motivate students to participate. I made the opportunity available to them and did not push for any participation beyond that. This meant that I only had three participants in this case study. Future research with more student participants could provide enlightening results.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore how attending an academic conference contributes to a community college student's sense of belonging. Although this research demonstrates greater bonding during and after conference attendance, as well as a sense of belonging within the college and the larger academic community, more research is needed to explore the impact of conference attendance and the impact of financial assistance for students who wish to travel. Despite this need for additional research, the findings from this study demonstrate many positive impacts attending a conference has on students. Whether or not I engage further with research on this subject, my peers will find me next year, filling out paperwork to bring a new batch of students to their conference.

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EDUCATING FUTURE LEADERS IN FRATERNITIES: OUTCOMES FROM PARTICIPATION IN A NATIONAL FRATERNITY EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM

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Campus engagement opportunities such as leadership development have potential for students to strengthen their personal skills. As such, fraternities and sororities can play an influential role in strengthening students' leadership skills. The present study examines the efficacy of a fraternity emerging leaders program, which is an educational opportunity focused on the development of new leaders. Data were collected from participants at three time intervals. Findings suggest students develop across several leadership domains, creating a stronger appreciation of their organizational values and fraternity ritual compared to non-participants. Recommendations for practice are included to address the transfer problem of leadership application and provide future directions for emerging leader program development.

Among the many engagement opportunities that exist on college and university campuses are fraternity/sorority-affiliated organizations, which are prominent organizations on many campuses and have historical ties back to the earliest days of colleges and universities in the United States (Horowitz, 1987). Fraternity/sorority-affiliated organizations place social connection and engagement central to the membership experience. Therefore, they provide means for creating enriching student involvement opportunities. Sororities and fraternities are isolated from Title IX legislation because of their adherence as single-gender organizations, which can concurrently provide for gender empowerment and spaces for furthering gender stereotypes and sexism (Sasso et al., 2020a; 2020b). Despite these potential challenges related to identity dynamics, which are stratified by race, gender, religion, and often social class, sororities and fraternities are grounded in values of brotherhood/sisterhood, philanthropy or service, academic excellence, and leadership practice, which can create a positive influence on leadership development (Bureau et al., 2021).

The role of fraternities on college campuses is widely debated, and perceptions of their purposes and practices vary greatly (Sasso, 2015). Issues of substance misuse, hazing, and other sophomoric behaviors featured in media headlines provide face validity to continued perceptions that fraternities are no more than speakeasies (Sasso, 2015; Sasso et al., 2022). These claims are also backed by research, which notes that fraternity members are more likely to engage in binge drinking, increase the frequency of substance misuse, increase patriarchal and misogy-

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nistic perspectives, and are less open to diversity (Sasso et al., 2022). Fraternity men are also campus purveyors of sexual violence and transmit forms of hegemonic or *toxic* masculinity (McCready & Radimer, 2020).

Despite these research outcomes and public perceptions, fraternities have yet to falter and are enduring campus social institutions (Sasso et al., 2020a; 2020b). Fraternity membership is positively associated with stronger retention and graduation rates, as well as greater engagement in career immediately following graduation and higher reports of well-being later in life (Gallup, 2014; Pike, 2000; 2003; 2020). Moreover, some campus and national fraternity organizations are engaging in efforts to build on these positive outcomes by reforming the notion of *fraternity* and reconstructing the meaning-making of their undergraduate members through leadership development.

As one example of these reform efforts, this exploratory study examines outcomes from an emerging leaders institute facilitated by a singular national fraternity to determine the program's ability to initiate positive change in rising undergraduate leaders to practice more effective and values-driven leadership within their fraternity chapters. This study was conducted on an emerging leaders program with 157 undergraduate participants, and compares self-reported knowledge and abilities in relation to leadership based on the program's learning outcomes. The study also explores self-reported behaviors related to the program's learning outcomes to examine if program attendees applied knowledge gained through participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This brief literature review begins by differentiating student involvement and engagement. This research includes additional research about member outcomes and leadership experiences in sororities and fraternities. Although not all national fraternities are members of national umbrella organizations, much of the research included in this literature review centers member organizations of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and National Interfraternity Conference (NIC). This literature review does not include identity-based or culturally-based organizations such as the National Pan-Hellenic Conference (NPHC).

Student Involvement and Engagement

Student involvement and engagement are often conflated terms. Kuh (2009) conceptualized student engagement as the time and effort that students spend on activities that are directly correlated with the desired outcomes from a college experience, as well as the institutional plans that allow students to participate in such activities. The term student engagement pertains to multiple subcategories, such as academic involvement, athletic involvement, and involvement with the faculty (Astin, 1977).

Astin's (1984) notion of student involvement was location-based. The more time students physically spend on campus, the more likely they are to engage in groups, events, and faculty interactions. Students acquire more knowledge when interested in the academic and social elements of college (Astin, 1999). Astin (1984) formulated five tenets or *postulates* of student involvement to the extent they: (1) have qualitative and quantitative characteristics; (2) require an investment of psychosocial and physical energy; (3) are a continuous process in which students invest varying amounts of energy; (4) have development that is directly proportional to the quality and quantity; and (5) have educational effectiveness that is proportional to the involvement.

Astin (1984) conceived of participation student-centered theory, as opposed to Kuh's engagement theory, which is an institutional theory (Kuh, 2009). Astin (1984) emphasized that the student bears the responsibility for engagement, since genuine participation takes an investment of energy in relationships, academics, and activities relevant to the on-campus experience. The student has control over how and with whom they spend their time, including with family, friends, academics, and other extracurricular activities (Astin, 1984). These types of obligations and close proximity to campus can discourage involvement and from the educational advantages of student engagement and result in a lack of academic and social integration (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

Braxton et al. (2013) created a more specific form of engagement from a psychosocial perspective, defining the term as the amount of psychological energy students invest in their social interactions with their peers and in their participation in their extracurricular activities. Furthermore, student involvement has also been found to positively correlate with self-confidence, communication, and interpersonal skills (Huang & Chang, 2004). These sorts of cocurricular programs are encouraged as institutional engagement and codified in sorority and fraternity standards programs (Bureau & Barber, 2020; Sasso, 2012).

While some critics argue that being involved in extracurricular activities may hinder students from engaging in academically-focused activities and, therefore, achieve suboptimal educational gains (Goedereis & Sasso, 2020; Kuh, 2009), empirical results demonstrate otherwise. Huang and Chang (2004) found that an increase in co-curricular (student) involvement is positively correlated with an increase in academic involvement. The premise of Astin's theory of involvement (1984) is the more engaged a student is in their experience, the greater opportunity for both cognitive as well as affective growth (Asel et al., 2009). Previous studies support that when students immerse themselves in their college career and engage in student involvement activities and student engagement programs, they are found to be more successful in educational gains and academic achievements (Hoffman et al., 2002; Pike, 2020).

Fraternity Membership Gains

Student engagement with university-facilitated fraternity and sorority programs leads to leadership development, and involvement in fraternity leadership positions is related to significant developmental gains. Participation in a sorority or fraternity is also connected to increases in community engagement and community service (Asel et al., 2009; Bureau & Koepsell, 2017). Sorority and fraternity members who have higher levels of involvement also report being more engaged on campus, have a higher sense of purpose, and benefit by practicing and developing leadership skills (DiChiara, 2009; Long, 2012; Pike, 2020).

Involvement in student organizations particularly is related to a number of individual academic and personal development gains (Sasso et al., 2020a; 2020b). Students have more credit hours and higher GPAs than non-affiliated students during their first year of college through their involvement in fraternity/sorority organizations (DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Debard et al., 2006). Additional studies also indicate higher communication and critical thinking abilities than unaffiliated students, illuminating greater gains related to personal and social skills through sorority/fraternity involvement (Hayek et al., 2002).

Pike (2000, 2003, 2020) also found significant gains related to fraternity members. Specifically, membership in a fraternity is associated with greater involvement in curricular student engagement programs and cocurricular student involvement activities, promotes student learning and development, and promotes satisfaction with the college experience (Pike, 2020). Similarly, Pike (2003, 2020) found a modest but positive association between fraternity/sorority affiliations and gains in learning, such as active learning and interactions with faculty. Pike (2020) also supported that the relationship in learning gains was stronger for fraternity/sorority-affiliated seniors than fraternity/sorority-affiliated first-year students, indicating fraternity/sorority organizations provide an ongoing academic environment that helps students develop important academic skills through their membership experience.

Fraternity and sorority participation leads to increases in attendance at campus student involvement activities and gains in leadership development during the first year of college (Aren et al., 2014; DiChiara, 2009; Martin et al., 2012; Sasso et al., 2020b). However, these increases are equalized by the senior year, during which there are no significant differences compared to unaffiliated students (Hevel et al., 2014). There are small cognitive development gains for fraternity membership after the first year, which include interpersonal growth, social interaction, collaborative work, and the ability to influence others (Pascarella et al., 2006). Notably, interpersonal skills are among the most salient gains with regard to collaborative work and learning measures (Martin et al., 2012; Pike, 2000, 2003). There are significant gains among fraternity members, which include the ability to influence others by the senior year (Asel et al., 2009; Hevel et al., 2014; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Pike, 2003; Sasso et al., 2020a). Fraternity/sorority members demonstrate outcomes related to leadership, service, and friendship (Long,

2012). These skills promote sense of belonging, interpersonal relationship skills, and self-perceived leadership ability for members (Long & Snowden, 2011; Martin et al., 2012).

Leadership in Fraternal Organizations

Participation in a fraternity generally suggests positive educational outcomes (Martin et al., 2012; Pike, 2020). Being a student leader in a campus organization significantly contributes to leadership development, decision-making skills, and feelings of personal competence (Astin, 1993; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Kuh, 1995; Pike, 2020). Along with educational gains, fraternities and sororities also provide opportunities for their members to benefit from significant gains in the interpersonal skills of leadership (Kelley, 2008). However, not all sorority and fraternity members are automatically leaders, and so chapters offer leadership positions and additional leadership trainings to promote skills development. Thus, sororities and fraternities are potential sites of leadership development that offer opportunities through student involvement (Sasso et al., 2020a; 2020b; Schoper et al., 2020).

Leadership development is an espoused outcome of membership across chapters and governing councils in which leadership and sense of identity intersect differently in the context of campus chapters (Atkinson et al., 2010; Barber et al., 2015; Cory, 2011). Students demonstrate leadership competencies complementary to the explicit and implicit norms of their chapter and their campus community, which are connected to identity dynamics (Barber et al., 2015). College women and men develop leadership differently to navigate power structures into higher positions (Madsen & Andrade, 2018). Fraternity members tended to vote their members into leadership, such as within student government associations (SGA), over more deserving female candidates (Goodman, 2021). Fraternity presidents also retained confidence in their leadership ability up to ten years after college (Kelley, 2008). In contrast, Harms et al. (2006) found fraternity and sorority members holding leadership positions were less often recognized as effective leaders.

For most members, leadership development occurs through holding a formal executive board or other leadership positions which is related to extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (DiChiara, 2009; Harms et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2012). There are many other benefits to becoming a leader or officer in a chapter (Gastfield, 2020; Kelley, 2008; Long & Snowden, 2011). Chapter presidents in fraternities/sororities report gains in interpersonal skills, organizational skills, teamwork, decision-making (Kelley, 2008). Members of fraternity/sorority organizations rated their leaders in their organization to be effective and accurate representations of their organization (Adams & Keim, 2000). Members with the strongest commitment to the organization are rated the highest by their peers (Dugan, 2008). Typically, chapter leaders gain this commitment through leadership experiences in executive meetings, retreats, and roundtables from campus programming (Long & Snowden, 2011).

Fraternity and sorority leaders receive additional specialized training to develop their technical abilities to fulfill the position's responsibilities, but also involving leadership development to help facilitate shared leadership and organizational management. Prior studies document the effectiveness of leadership programs for fraternity members to increase levels of success in academics, service to others, and leadership competency (Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Dugan, 2008; Isacco et al., 2013). However, there is a lack of published assessment about these nationally sponsored organizational leadership programs despite having data such as GPA, membership rosters, initiation rates, chapter consultations, and needs-based or satisfaction surveys (Barber et al., 2020; Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Hesp & Biddix, 2009).

National Sorority/Fraternity Leadership Programs

Students seek leadership skills to grow during their undergraduate experience (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Schoper et al., 2020). Participation in formal leadership development programs as a form of student engagement facilitates gains in confidence, leadership skills, and openness to serve in a leadership role (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). Particularly for men, leadership skills are developed at higher rates by participating in a leadership class (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). For other formal programs, participation leads to significantly higher scores in areas like common purpose and citizenship (Dugan, 2006).

Prior studies document the effectiveness of national and campus-based leadership programs for sorority and fraternity members. Across both private and public academic institutions, leadership programs for fraternity members have increased levels of success in academics, service to others, and leadership development (Dugan, 2008; Isacco et al., 2013). A 10-year program evaluation of a national fraternity emerging leaders program elucidated that program participants were more likely to assume a leadership role eventually becoming chapter president, self-reported they felt better connected to their organizational rituals and values, and increased their fraternity commitment (Biddix & Underwood, 2010). Such programs are common and provide additional specialized training to develop participants' technical and leadership abilities to fulfill the position responsibilities, but also involve leadership development to help facilitate shared leadership and organizational management (Biddix & Underwood, 2010). Our current study aims to address the gap in current literature regarding the effectiveness and outcomes of leadership programs sponsored by national organizations. The findings of this study are intended to explore and provide support for the efficacy of these leadership programs.

METHODS

Research Site

This study examines one national fraternity from the North American Interfraternity Conference and its emerging leaders program, a voluntary participatory four-day immersive leadership development program that engages undergraduate chapter members nationwide. An annual program takes place each summer and involves a mix of large-group lectures, small-group sessions, service-learning opportunities, and topic-based sessions. The overall programming consists of sessions that focus on a variety of topics pertaining to the planning and management of a successful chapter. The sessions also include new member education, academic excellence, chapter finances, values-based recruitment, facilitating the organization's ritual education, implementing community service and philanthropy, and practicing effective communication. Each of these sessions is intended to shape the participants' future behavior as leaders through different routes of chapter involvement. These sessions intend to provide attendees with high-level, but foundational, knowledge of important areas of chapter operations to prepare them for future roles as chapter leaders.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of an emerging leaders program sponsored and hosted by a national fraternity. This study utilized a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test survey design. The independent variable in this study was the emerging leaders program. The dependent variables in this study were the time interval in the pre-event, post-event, and follow-up conditions among the experimental group of program participants. In employing a quasi-experimental design through the use of a randomly selected control group of emerging leader participants, this study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) Does the emerging leaders program influence a participant's knowledge regarding chapter leadership, leadership skills, and likelihood of engaging in behaviors related to leadership?

(2) Are there significant differences between emerging leader program participants and non-participants in the areas of knowledge, abilities, and behaviors (campus involvement, service learning) fraternity ritual, symbols and regalia, chapter operations (finance, risk management), and recruitment?

Sample

This was a singular organizational study of one fraternity in which purposive sampling methods were utilized to identify a convenience sample of study participants (n = 157). Inclusion criteria for the study included active fraternity membership in good standing and in attendance at the emerging leaders program (n = 62), but non-program attendance for the comparison group (n = 95). The comparison group was randomly generated from the general membership database by fraternity staff using the following criteria: (1) completion of at least one year of college enrollment; (2) active membership in good standing, and (3) no participation in the emerging leadership program. These criteria were utilized to develop a counterfactual group among the comparison group sample to create similarity with program attendees based on eligibility for the emerging leaders program.

The experimental group demographics among program attendees were relatively consistent over the three surveyed periods (pre-event, post-event, follow-up). The similarity in demographic representation among the experimental group of program attendees and the control group of non-program members contributes to the external validity of the study's findings. Table 1 presents the information on both ELA and non-ELA respondents.

Table 1. *Data of ELA and non-ELA Respondents.*

	Pre-Program	Post-Program	Follow-up	Comparison Group
Respondents	62	30	54	95
Sophomores	28.5%	60%	22%	20%
Juniors	31%	33%	56%	42%
Seniors	40.6%	3.3%	22%	38%
Prior leadership event attendance	23%	74%	74%	56%
Currently serving in chapter leadership role	46%	43%	59%	46%

Procedure

The instrument was distributed in three individual cycles: pre-test, post-test, and follow-up. First, an online pre-test was distributed via email to all emerging leader program participants one week before the emerging leaders program. This pre-test asked respondents to self-report their knowledge, skills, and experiences related to their fraternity membership experience. Upon arrival at the program, participants were also given an oral reminder in person to encourage participation among those who had not yet completed the survey. A post-test survey with identical questions was distributed again to the same participants at the end immediately after completion of the training. A second, final post-test was sent 30 days later to the same participants to assess longer-term learning and applicant of content from the emerging leaders program. Thirty days after the completion of the program, another follow-up post-test was also sent to program participants and a random sample of non-participating fraternity members to construct a comparison group. These time lapses were intentionally selected to allow participants to be more removed and distant from the program to allow for more authentic assessment. This control group received the follow-up post-test survey during the same time period as the program participant group. Email reminders were sent for the second and follow-up post-tests to all fraternity member study participants to encourage participation.

Instrument

The same pre-test/post-test survey was used at each of the three intervals. These constructs of the survey were aligned with the emerging leaders program learning outcomes, which included: (1) membership experience; (2) membership education; (3) regalia and ritual; (4) chapter operations; and (5) recruitment. Each of these five domains were segmented into two standardized sections: "knowledge & abilities" and "actions and behaviors." Participants were asked about their knowledge & abilities (confidence), i.e., "I can…" and then asked about actions and behaviors, i.e., "To what extent have you engaged in any of the following activities."

Membership experience asked participants about service learning, other student organization involvement, and risk management. Questions included such as "I can identify potential risk management concerns within my chapter" or "I can identify ways to get my chapter and fellow members involved in the campus community." Member education asked participants about facilitating and implementing programming for new member education and included questions such as "Created and implemented a schedule of leadership and professional development programs for my chapter" and "I can effectively lead a new member education program, including in-person education and Phase I online new member education." Regalia and ritual asked participants about the symbols and initiation ceremonies and included questions such as "I can identify the areas of the initiation ceremony my chapter needs to improve." Chapter operations asked participants to rate their understanding of risk management and minimum chapter standards. Questions included "I can create a plan for my chapter to

complete the requirements for the chapter excellence packet" and "I can explain all six parts of the risk management policy." Recruitment asked participants about their member marketing efforts and included questions such as "I can create a brand for my chapter" and "I can create a recruitment plan specific to my chapter."

Content validity was facilitated by the fraternity educational programs team, whose members are responsible for designing the curriculum and program structure. Their feedback was used to refine the program outcomes that served as the constructs of the instrument used in this study. Criterion validity was facilitated by piloting the survey with current undergraduate fraternity members, and results were reviewed by the educational program team prior to survey administration. This instrument was authored specifically to assess this emerging leaders program and was never used prior to this research study.

The pre-test survey consisted of demographic questions, including the chapter the participant was representing, academic year in college, if they were currently serving in a chapter officer role, and if they had previously attended a leadership training program sponsored by the national organization. All participants were asked to report their current knowledge or understanding of three general program outcomes by responding with a five-point Likert-type agreement scale, with 5 indicating strongest agreement and 1 indicating strongest disagreement with the statement regarding their current knowledge, ability, or behaviors.

The five-point scale used for knowledge and ability outcomes included a neutral point score of 3. Therefore, any mean scores that garnered a 3 or greater provided grounds to assume average scores fell within the range of agreement with learning outcomes statements. The general program outcomes included questions regarding knowing how to get chapter members involved on campus, creating community service opportunities, and identifying risk management concerns with their chapter. Participants were then asked questions related to the learning outcomes of the specific programming track they indicated they planned to attend.

The post-test and follow-up surveys included an additional question set asking the extent to which the participant had engaged in activities and behaviors related to the program's learning outcomes. The inclusion of behavior-related questions was intended to capture if attendees applied the knowledge they reported gaining related to the program learning outcomes. For example, in asking in the pre- and post-program survey if attendees have knowledge of how to create community service opportunities, the follow-up survey also asked to what extent attendees actually created community service opportunities. Behavior-related questions were also asked for each set of learning outcomes related to the programming tracks. Behavior-related outcomes were measured on a three-point scale in which respondents indicated the extent to which they have engaged in a specific behavior or taken a specific action related to the program's outcomes, with a 1 response indicating no reported experience or actions and 3 indicating completion of action or full engagement in a behavior.

Data Analysis

For Research Question One, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the emerging leaders program (IV) on time interval (DV) in pre-event, post-event, and follow-up conditions among the experimental group of program participants. For Research Question Two, the analysis also included a comparison of the reported general program outcomes and track-specific outcomes between the emerging leader program participants at the follow-up interval and the non-participant fraternity members who served as the control group. This analysis included comparing means of the reported knowledge and abilities to assess differences in understanding and awareness of key chapter leadership concepts as well as reported behaviors and actions related to key chapter leadership activities as presented through the various programming tracks. Independent t-tests were conducted to assess the differences in responses among program participants and the control group of non-participants.

RESULTS

Regarding Research Question 1 – Does the emerging leaders program influence a participant's knowledge regarding chapter leadership, leadership skills, and likelihood of engaging behaviors related to leadership? – there was an overall main effect of the emerging leaders program. This was for two of the three computed variables in pretest-posttest data: identifying involvement opportunities and community service opportunities (Tables 2 and 3). For the variable related to identifying involvement opportunities, there was a main effect of the emerging leaders program, such that participation in the program saw an increase in understanding of how to identify involvement opportunities for their chapter, F (2, 144) = 3.294, p = .040. For the variable related to community service creation, there was a main effect of the emerging leaders program, such that participation in the program saw an increase in identifying community service opportunities for their chapter, F (2, 144) = 3.827, p = .024.

Table 2. *One-Way ANOVA of Survey Response by Program Participation for Involvement Identification.*

Source	*df*	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Between groups	2	5.681	2.841	3.94	.040
Within groups	144	124.169	.862		
Total	146	129.850			
*p < .05					

Table 3. *One-Way ANOVA of Survey Response by Program Participation for Community.Service.*

Source	*df*	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Between groups	2	6.726	3.363	3.827	.024
Within groups	144	126.553	.879		
Total	146	133.279			
*p <.05					

Post hoc tests using Tukey were utilized to identify statistically significant differences in means between the pre-event and post-event for involvement identification and community service opportunity identification among program participants. For the involvement identification (InvolvID) variable, post-event (M = 4.44, SD = .801) responses were greater than pre-event (M = 3.92, SD = .9), (p=.03). Similarly, post-event (M = 4.50, SD = .842) responses for community service (CommServ) opportunity identification were greater than pre-event (M = 3.93, SD = .910), (p=.018). Follow-up responses were not analyzed and are used as the control (comparison) group for the second research question to compare the program efficacy to non-participants in the emerging leaders program.

Regarding Research Question 2 – Are there significant differences between emerging leader program participants and non-participants in the areas of knowledge, abilities, and behaviors (campus involvement, service learning), fraternity ritual, symbols and regalia, chapter operations (finance, risk management), and recruitment? – we break results into four categories: Member Experience, Fraternity Ritual and Symbols and Regalia, Chapter Operations, and Recruitment (see summary Table 10).

Membership Experience (Campus Involvement, Service Learning)

In terms of member experience, there were no significant differences in means observed between emerging leader participants and non-participant respondents for all three general program outcomes variables for knowledge and abilities. In terms of reported actions and behaviors, there was a statistically significant difference found for the involvement identification variable, such that the ELA attendees (M = 2.57, SD = .633) responses were greater than non-participants (M = 2.23, SD = .750), t(147) = 2.83, p = .005 (Table 4). However, there were no significant differences in means observed between participants and non-participant respondents for the variables *community service creation* and *risk management concern identification*.

Table 4. *t-test Comparison of Reported Actions for Participants vs. Non-Participant Respondents.*

			ELA		Non-ELA	
Outcome	t(147)	p	M	SD	M	SD
Involvement*	2.830	.005	2.57	.633	2.23	.750

Note. *The variable InvolvID found a statistically significant difference between the participant attendees (n = 54) and non-participant respondent (n = 95) means.

There were no significant differences in means observed between participants who attended member education trainings and non-participants respondents for all four outcomes of the member education in terms of reported knowledge and ability. However, in terms of reported actions and behaviors, there was a statistically significant difference among program participants (M = 1.92, SD = .793) and non-participants (M = 1.45, SD = .651) related to describing the national fraternity membership development program to their chapter, t(105) = 2.27, p = .025 (Table 5).

Table 5. *Pre & Post Event t-test Comparison of Reported Actions and Behaviors for Program Participants vs. Non-Participant Respondents Related to Member Education Training.*

				ELA		Non-ELA	
Outcome	Time	t(105)	p	M	SD	M	SD
Member	Pre	.972	.344	2.00	.603	1.81	.854
Education	Post	2.270	.025	1.92	.793	1.45	.651

Note. There were no significant differences in means observed between program attendees (n = 12) and non-program respondents (n = 95) for all variables but Member Education, $p < .05$.

Fraternity Ritual and Symbols & Regalia

In terms of reported knowledge and ability related to the fraternity ritual education, a statistically significant difference in means was found for the ritual mechanism explanation variable, such that program participants who attended (M = 4.71, SD = .488) reported higher means than non-participants (M = 3.88, SD =.999), t(100) = 2.173, p = .032 (see Table 6). In terms of reported actions and behaviors, a statistically significant difference in means was found for all three variables for fraternity ritual trainings, in which program participants reported higher means than non-participant respondents in their experiences in describing the mechanics, regalia, and symbolism of ritual, explaining the mechanics and symbolism to their chapter, and identifying areas of improvement for their chapter's initiation ceremony (see Table 7).

Table 6. *t-test comparison of Reported Knowledge and Ability for Program Participants vs. Non-Program Respondents Related to Fraternity Ritual.*

			ELA		Non-ELA	
Outcome	t(100)	p	M	SD	M	SD
Ritual Mechanism	2.173	.032	4.71	.488	3.88	.999

Note. There were no significant differences in means observed between program participants (n = 7) and non-participant respondents (n = 95) for all variables except Ritual Mechanism Explanation, $p < .05$

Table 7. *t-test comparison of Reported Actions and Behaviors for Program Participants vs. Non-Program Respondents Related to Fraternity Ritual.*

			ELA		Non-ELA	
Outcome	t(100)	p	M	SD	M	SD
Ritual Description	2.434	.039	2.71	.488	2.22	.792
Ritual Mechanism	4.236	.002	2.86	.378	2.16	.794
Initiation	3.347	.007	2.86	.378	2.30	.818

Note. Variables include: Ritual Description (RitualDes), Ritual Mechanism Explanation (RitualM), and Initiation Improvement Identification (Initiation). Statistically significant differences in means between participant respondents ($n = 7$) and non-participant respondents ($n = 95$) were found for all three variables, $p < .05$.

Chapter Operations (Finance, Risk Management)

There were no significant differences in means observed between program participant attendees who attended the chapter operations training and non-participant respondents in reported knowledge and abilities to plan for completing requirements for chapter excellence or explaining the organization's risk management policies. In terms of reported actions and behaviors, a statistically significant difference was observed in which program participants ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .786$) reported higher means in their behaviors related to creating a plan to complete chapter excellence requirements than those of non-program respondents ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .794$) (see Table 8).

Table 8. *t-test Comparison of Reported Actions and Behaviors for Participants vs. Non-Participant Respondents Related to Chapter Operations.*

			ELA		Non-ELA	
Outcome	t(112)	P	M	SD	M	SD
Chapter Operations	2.099	.038	2.25	.786	1.84	.794

Note. There was a significant difference in means observed between program participants ($n = 20$) and non-participant respondents ($n = 95$) for the variable Chapter Operations (ChapOp), $p < .05$.

Recruitment

Regarding outcomes for the recruitment programming, statistically significant differences in means were found for all four variables related to reported knowledge and abilities to lead a recruitment workshop for the chapter, create a brand for the chapter, create a recruitment plan for the chapter, and using online management software for the recruitment plan. For all four of these knowledge and ability learning outcomes for the recruitment programming track, program participants who attended the recruitment programming reported significantly higher means than non-participant respondents (see Table 9).

In terms of reported actions and behaviors, statistically significant differences between means were observed in which program participants attendees report higher means for creating a brand for their chapter ($M = 2.53$, $SD = .516$) and applying online software to their recruitment plan ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .884$) than non-participant respondents ("create a brand" = $M = 2.03$, $SD = .831$, "apply chapter builder = $M = 1.61$, $SD = .789$). There were no significant differences in means observed between program participants and non-participant respondents for behaviors and actions related to leading a recruitment workshop or creating a recruitment plan (see Table 10).

Table 9. *t-test Comparison of Reported Knowledge and Abilities for Program Participants.*

				Pre-Event		**Post-Event**	
Outcome	df	t	p	M	SD	M	SD
Involvement	91	2.744	.007	3.92	.900	4.44	.801
Community Service	91	2.918	.004	3.93	.910	4.50	.842
Ritual Mechanism	100	2.173	.032	4.71	.488	3.88	.999
Leading Recruitment Workshop	108	4.917	.000	4.47	.516	3.57	1.217
Create Brand	108	3.765	.000	4.40	.507	3.73	1.189
Create Recruitment Plan	108	2.405	.018	4.53	.640	3.81	1.133
Apply Chapter Builder	108	3.621	.001	4.33	.900	3.37	1.272

Note. Variables include: Leading recruitment workshop (LeadRec), Create brand (CreateB), Create recruitment plan (CreateRec), and Apply Chapter Builder (Apply), statistically significant differences in means between program participants attendees (n = 15) and non-participant respondents (n = 95) were observed for all four variables.

Table 10. *Summary t-test Comparison of Reported Actions and Behaviors for Participants vs. Non-Participant Respondents.*

				ELA		**Non-ELA**	
Outcome	Df	T	P	M	SD	M	SD
Involvement	147	2.830	.005	2.57	.633	2.23	.750
Ritual Description	100	2.434	.039	2.71	.488	2.22	.792
Ritual Mechanism Explanation	100	4.236	.002	2.86	.378	2.16	.794
Initiation Improvement Identification	100	3.347	.007	2.86	.378	2.30	.818
Chapter Operations	112	2.099	.038	2.25	.786	1.84	.794
Creating a Brand	108	2.265	.025	2.53	.516	2.03	.831
Creating a Brand	108	2.046	.043	2.07	.884	1.61	.789

Note. *The variable InvolvID found a statistically significant difference between the participant attendees (n = 54) and non-participant respondent (n = 95) means. Variables Ritual Description (RitualDes), Ritual Mechanism Explanation (RitualM), and Initiation Improvement Identification (Initiation), had statistically significant differences in means between participant respondents. There was a significant difference in means observed between program participants (n = 20) and non-participant respondents (n = 95) for the variable, Chapter Operations (ChapOp), $p < .05$. There were Statistically significant differences in means between program participants (n = 15) and non-participant respondents (n = 95) were observed for creating a brand (CreateB) and applying online software, $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

This emerging leaders program was evaluated by surveying program attendees at three separate intervals to compare pre and post-event for participants, and long-term self-reported outcomes to compare to non-participants. Findings from the data analysis suggest that there were statistically significant differences between the pre-test and post-test responses for program participants. Specifically, there were significant differences in the final follow-up post-test between participants and non-participants in variables related to fraternity ritual, recruitment, chapter operations, and member education. This indicates that participants may gain a deeper nuanced understanding compared to non-participants about connecting with their organizational values because

they self-reported an increased ability to understand fraternity ritual, recruitment, and member education, which are also used to facilitate brotherhood by emerging chapter leaders. These findings can be contextualized as they contribute to the existing research and provide a better description of the leadership development of fraternity members.

A majority of responses showed a peak in the immediate post-test, suggesting that the responses may be higher because of the immediacy of the leadership information directly after the program. Significant differences were not observed between all variables on the post-tests, but there were differences between the pre-test and final post-test also related to involvement and community service opportunity identification. Results support program participants having a greater level of identifying involvement opportunities for their chapter, suggesting that the program encouraged members to increase their activities related to promoting campus involvement among chapter members. Participants were connected to broader campus involvement and service learning outcomes (Schoper et al., 2020).

In particular, the membership education programming participants reporting significantly higher means suggests having a greater knowledge of member development principles they can practice within their chapter to develop their peers. As aforementioned, program participants reported greater means in fraternity ritual, symbolism, and regalia, as well as improving ritual ceremonies. These differences indicate that the emerging leaders program strengthens participants' ability when it comes to aspects of the fraternity experience grounded in values and ritual. Values and ritual reflection are connected to moral development in undergraduate students (Tull et al., 2022).

Emerging leaders program participants also reported a greater understanding of successful chapter operations, such as chapter excellence requirements and recruitment. Findings suggest program participants gained important knowledge and took action to effectively assist in preparing their chapter to successfully recruit new members, which included chapter brand development, recruitment planning, and chapter building. These experiences as chapter leaders are connected to career competency development (Peck. 2018; Peck & Callahan, 2019).

Lastly, findings from the comparison between program participants and the non-program respondents in the second post-test suggest that the emerging leadership program is an efficacious leadership development program. Across all variable categories, non-participant respondents typically reported lower means than program participants. Further, this highlights that some components of chapter leadership and operations necessitate specialized leadership training through experiences such as an emerging leaders program and are less likely to be learned and practiced by general members. These findings are related to other emerging leaders programs for sorority or fraternity members, which demonstrate support for previous studies regarding increased levels of knowledge, ability, and behaviors related to leadership after leadership program engagement (Dugan, 2008; Isacco et al., 2013; Rosch & Caza, 2012).

This study is distinctive in that it examines one national fraternity's emerging leaders development program to explore its efficacy. The applicability for the efficacy of leadership programs such as this emerging leaders program can be extended to the greater fraternity and sorority community, as well as student organizations. The concept of a program that emphasizes leadership skills and a strong identification and affinity towards one's organization may contribute to increased knowledge, abilities, and behaviors in relation to leadership.

Limitations

There are limitations related to both the internal and external validity of this study. Self-report instruments were used in this study and featured a convenience sample, which may facilitate response bias or socially desirable responses by study participants. Although attempts were made to facilitate content and construct validity, the surveys used were not empirically validated and this could have impacted the findings. Participants were not asked to disclose their multiple identities, including race, gender, or class. There was no differentiation between student identities or institutional differences. The inclusion of the follow-up survey conducted multiple months after the program was intended to mitigate this limitation by allowing attendees to report experiences at a time

in which they are more removed and distant from the program. This time lapse may have contributed to an attrition bias in this study, given the differences in pre-test and post-test cohort sizes and response rates. The control group only completed the second post-test, and having the control group complete all three surveys at similar time intervals as the program participants may paint a more holistic picture for a longitudinal study.

The generalizability of this study might be limited as this was a singular organizational study. These study findings presented are not causal, were only exploratory, and were mostly descriptive. Thus, this study is not predictive, and its findings cannot claim the utility of an emerging leadership program for other sororities or fraternities. Future research should explore different types of national fraternity leadership programs and facilitate longitudinal studies to assess their efficacy over time.

Implications for Practice

While it is anticipated these study findings could be replicated within similar men's fraternal organizations, more research is still needed about leadership development programs sponsored by fraternities or sororities to strengthen the external validity of this study. Moreover, there are several recommendations for practice that can be gleaned from this study's findings. These recommendations for practice are offered to extend the boundaries of existing national fraternity or sorority leadership programs and integrate the role of student involvement professionals. These recommendations or any incentives for leadership should be integrated into chapter standards or awards programs to incentivize member leadership development within chapters (Bureau & Barber, 2020; Sasso, 2012).

Accessibility. This study was comprised of members from a general NIC fraternity. Traditional theories of leadership hold the assumption that all students have equal access to resources or support structures that allow them to become a fully developed leader. However, there are considerations relative to who has access and is allowed to demonstrate leadership skills (Taylor, Jr. & Lawrence, 2020). Future leadership trainings for emerging chapter leaders should consider the ways in which it can be made more accessible for a broader spectrum of members. Emerging leadership programs should consider the limitations of social class (Bureau et al., 2021). This should be sensitive to commuter as well as first-generation student needs (Goedereis & Sasso, 2020; Harrel-Hallmark et al., 2022; Sasso & Paladini, 2021). This could mean offering travel subsidies to chapters or discounts for these specific social identities or providing this training via an online platform to reach the broader membership. Campuses should support participation in emerging leadership programs through access to their campus student travel fund.

Critical Thinking. While leadership programs have a psychosocial developmental effect for fraternity members across their undergraduate experience, there is little to no critical thinking development that occurs between the first and fourth year of college (Waltz & Sasso, 2021). Waltz and Sasso (2021) noted the relationship between critical thinking and implicit bias in college men. Male student leaders demonstrated less tendency to hold confirmation bias than non-leaders and were more likely to have lower critical thinking ability when there was a greater tendency to hold confirmation bias.

To reduce these effects in college men, fraternity leadership programs offer promise as the research conducted centers critical thinking development through critical thinking instruction in the classroom, and these programs can be sites of potential instruction (Lange & Stewart, 2019). The highest predictor for leadership skills among men was participating in a leadership class or formal program (Dugan, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty. 2000). Future leadership programs can include critical thinking development curriculum to and embrace notions of how students learn through a holistic experience based on the postulates of Astin (1999) to support the critical thinking gains in fraternity members during the senior year (Hevel et al., 2014).

Difficult Conversations. Students' implicit attitudes hinder critical thinking development in college male leaders (Waltz & Sasso, 2021). They are not prepared for difficult dialogues because undergraduate students, particularly college men, are also more likely to hold confirmation bias, which reinforces their own belief systems and restricts openness, thereby hindering the development of critical thinking (Waltz & Sasso, 2021). Emerging

fraternity leaders should be prepared to engage in difficult conversations, including those about social class and cultural differences (Bureau et al., 2021; Parker & Pascarella, 2013, 2018). Understanding students' differential access to different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural) affects collaborative dynamics with other members for access to leadership positions and overall chapter participation (Harrel-Hallmark et al., 2022).

Also, understanding how these forms of capital influence the disruption of implicit biases can reduce assumptions by emerging leaders about their fellow brothers to humanize other experiences (Bureau et al., 2021; Parker & Pascarella, 2013, 2018). Schoper et al. (2020) commented that leaders could develop a more complex understanding of their world, which will increase the extent to which they "notice, consider, question, and engage in their experiences" (p. 103). Student involvement professionals can help national organizations gauge readiness and prepare students to return to their chapters to implement strategies for meaningful conversations and action (Nagda & Roper, 2019).

Integrating Student Involvement Professionals. It is not uncommon for student affairs professionals to be invited to facilitate sessions at sorority and fraternity leadership programs such as the one in this study, but there needs to be a greater campus connection beyond the specific fraternal organization (Sasso et al., 2020). Professionals in student involvement can also serve as complementary campus facilitators to assist sorority and fraternity members in applying their positional (president, treasurer, etc.) and organizational knowledge. Sororities and fraternities serve as sites of potential leadership instruction, and student involvement professionals offer positionality to address the transfer problem in which programs focus too much emphasis on learning outcomes and do not teach the application of their newly learned leadership skills (Lange & Stewart, 2019; Reyes et al., 2019).

Student involvement campus professionals should also be mindful not to duplicate existing national organization positional trainings, which may be redundant. Such programs typically take place as retreats or other leadership sessions (Pearlman et al., 2023). Rather, there should be an emphasis on connecting sorority and fraternity members to more comprehensive leadership programs or a focus on leadership development within campus-based councils executive boards.

Formal leadership programs have demonstrated efficacy beyond singular-event or short-term programs (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Rosch & Caza, 2012). These programs should use intentional curricula with a conceptual framework, such as the social change model (Parker & Pascarella, 2018). Future leadership programs can include critical thinking development curriculum to and embrace notions of how students learn through a holistic experience based on the postulates of Astin (1999) to support the critical thinking gains in fraternity members by their senior year (Hevel et al., 2015; Waltz & Sasso, 2021). Executive-board development on sorority/fraternity governing councils (NPC, NIC, NPHC, etc.) should be a priority as these campus-wide organizations have explicit career connections to leadership development which integrate co-curricular learning (Peck, 2018; Peck & Callahan, 2019; Walker & Havice, 2016).

Additionally, participants in this study self-reported ability to facilitate new member education programs. Student involvement professionals should challenge senior chapter leaders to expand their scope to consider how new member education could be a space to teach and practice leadership skills to emerging leaders to move beyond teaching organizational values and history. Integrating new members into campus councils or chapter committees and coordinator positions as early as possible offers opportunities to practice leadership skills (Pearlman et al., 2023; Schoper et al., 2020). This may allow for a more seamless transition into progressive positions with more responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Significant differences were demonstrated between program participants and members who did not attend the program, suggesting that the emerging leaders program has a positive impact across various learning outcomes. Further, there are numerous program outcomes associated with various facets of student engagement, such as identifying campus involvement and community service, that extend beyond leadership development outcomes.

Numerous other fraternal organizations plan and host similar emerging leaders programs. Opportunities to continue studies similar to this study are available. To have continued study of the effects of leadership development programming on the fraternity chapter experience will necessitate more than just a single organizational commitment to building this body of research but will require a commitment to generating findings that create a positive narrative and support for the leadership development opportunities that exist within fraternal organizations.

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TROUBLING THE COMPLEXITY OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN MINORITIZED IDENTITY OF SEXUALITY AND/OR GENDER-BASED CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS

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Research has highlighted the connection between involvement and important postsecondary outcomes such as persistence, interpersonal/intrapersonal development, civic engagement, and multicultural competence, among many others. However, for students with minoritized identities of sexuality and gender (MIoSG), engaging in identity-based organizations comes with both risks and benefits, especially in a time of increasingly prevalent anti-queer and anti-trans U.S.-based legislation. Our findings reveal the complexity of student experiences, with a specific focus on STEM students who hold MIoSG, from overall positive involvement experiences to barriers such as danger, inactive clubs, and lack of campus spaces. This focus on MIoSG students within STEM disciplines is important, as students often report STEM spaces as particularly oppressive, therefore having a high need for counter spaces where their identities are supported. These findings could help practitioners rethink how to design campus spaces where students do not have to fear for their physical, emotional, and professional safety.

We exist in a time of increasingly prevalent anti-queer and anti-trans U.S.-based legislation (Peele, 2023) that affects how students with minoritized identities of sexuality and/or gender (MIoSG, Vaccaro, et al., 2015) experience colleges and universities. For example, at the time of this writing, Florida lawmakers are actively trying to implement the Individual Freedom Act (2022), commonly known as the Stop WOKE Act, at the higher education level. The Individual Freedom Act, currently in effect in Florida's K-12 schools and some workplaces, limits how educators can discuss topics including race and gender and limits any discussion on systemic oppression and/or violence. This legislation will impact both if and how MIoSG community and history, especially Black and Indigenous MIoSG history, will be discussed in courses and represented in curricular content. With these increasingly oppressive campus environments, campus involvement can hold many benefits for students' postsecondary outcomes (Komives, 2019; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Vetter et al., 2019). Supportive communities, which are often found through involvement, are imperative for students with MIoSG who already face additional barriers to college persistence, such as representation, financial strain (Garvey et al., 2022), and access to equitable facilities such as restrooms (Vigneau et al., 2023).

The present study highlights the complexity of both positive and challenging involvement experiences of STEM students with MIoSG. As such, it adds to the literature in two distinct ways. First, our participants were STEM students with MIoSG. Literature has revealed pervasive cisheteropatriarchy in STEM environments (Friedensen

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et al., 2021a; Miller et al., 2021b; Wright & Delgado, 2023). For example, Miller et al. (2021b), found that students with MIoSG often navigate a "dude" culture within STEM, where those who are not heterosexual and identify as a man are treated as inferior and less intelligent. This may lead students with MIoSG to seek safe and affirming spaces on campus, including clubs and organizations. Second, our work provides insight into the involvement experiences of students with MIoSG in affinity-centered groups. Understanding and unpacking these experiences is even more critical given the wave of anti-MIoSG legislation sweeping the country. The purpose of this study is to examine the campus involvement experiences of STEM students with MIoSG in MIoSG organizations. As such, this work offers student affairs professionals nuanced and contextualized insights for working with STEM students with MIoSG on contemporary college campuses.

It is important to address the difficulty in finding language that fully encompasses the identities present in this study. For example, the language used by, and about trans people is steadily and actively changing, and there are no widely accepted terms in the English language that adequately encompass all non-cisgender and non-heterosexual identities. Our research team made an intentional decision to avoid the use of LGBTQ+ as an identity label because the acronym leaves out and makes invisible many queer identities. Although imperfect, we have intentionally chosen the MIoSG acronym because we believe it most fully and authentically represents the participants in this study as a group that experiences minoritization based on sexuality and/or gender. In the following sections, we use the term MIoSG unless referencing a specific study or organization that used a different acronym.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Involvement Benefits

In 1984, Astin postulated a theory of student involvement that discussed the importance of the quality and quantity of student involvement in academic work, extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty, staff, and peers. In a later definition of involvement, Astin (1993) referred to it as the amount of physical and psychological time and energy a student puts into the educational process, including activities (e.g., student organizations, activism) that occur outside the classroom. Decades of empirical research have highlighted the connection between involvement and important postsecondary outcomes such as persistence, cognitive complexity, interpersonal development, intrapersonal development, civic engagement, and multicultural competence, among many others (Garvey et al., 2017; Komives, 2019; Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Vetter et al., 2019). In their study of 2973 students at 13 universities, Vetter et al. (2019) found that "investing deeply in one or two meaningful co-curricular experiences" (p. 39) can lead to positive scores on the thriving scale, an instrument used to measure the ways in which students experience college, persist in their degrees, and have academic and emotional success. These positive trends can also be seen in students with MIoSG, as a recent study of 3,121 graduates from all 50 states and Puerto Rico found MIoSG student involvement in co-curricular activities correlated with positive campus climate perceptions (Garvey et al., 2017).

Despite the benefits, MIoSG students can also face challenges when attempting to become involved in campus organizations, including concerns for safety (Forsythe et al., 2023) or only receiving partial acceptance from their peers or mentors (Marine and Nicolazzo, 2014; Miller & Downey, 2020; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). For example, Forsythe et al. (2023), found that students with MIoSG must make calculated decisions on whether to participate in organizations they may be outed in for fear of harassment by their peers or fear of professional ramifications within their fields. To address these concerns, many campuses have organized identity-specific organizations to help increase students' sense of belonging and persistence through their degrees.

Involvement in MIoSG-specific organizations

A large body of research highlights the benefits and challenges of student involvement in identity-specific organizations on campus. Often, students become involved in identity-specific campus groups and organizations (e.g., MIoSG student organizations) as a way to find support, belonging, and camaraderie with others who hold a similar identity (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Mena & Vaccaro, 2011; Pitcher et al., 2018; Vaccaro & Newman,

2017). Specifically, MIoSG student organizations provide safe and comfortable environments where students can connect, often leading to satisfaction and retention on campus (Pitcher et al., 2018) and providing vital resources and support to LGBTQ students (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Westbrook, 2009). The mere presence of such organizations often has a positive impact on sense of belonging for students with MIoSG, whether or not they participate in the organizations (i.e., as members, attendees, or officers; Forsythe et al., 2023; Garvey et al., 2017; Pitcher et al., 2018; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). Nicolazzo et al. (2019) discussed the importance of these organizations for trans students, specifically citing the impact of these organizations on trans students' persistence through their collegiate careers by building community and support both on and off campus.

Despite the vast benefits of involvement in MIoSG campus organizations, a few studies also note challenges. Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) found that umbrella organizations focused on the queer community often led to tensions for support and resources, such as how to name centers to include all identities (specifically trans identities), the types of programming offered, and to whom it was offered, and the over /under-representation of specific MIoSG in the staff. Duran and Nicolazzo (2017) found that some MIoSG-focused organizations created toxic environments for trans students who were continuously misgendered, and McKinney (2005) uncovered that staff within MIoSG centers had little education on trans student support. Other scholars have found predominantly white student organizations for MIoSG students to be racist and emotionally exhausting spaces (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

In sum, the literature suggests that despite some challenges, involvement in extracurricular activities (general campus-wide or MIoSG-focused) yields educational, social, and identity-related benefits to students. Yet, we know little empirically about campus involvement broadly and involvement in student organizations for MIoSG students majoring in STEM fields.

METHODS

The findings in this paper come from a larger study (Vaccaro et al., 2021) in which we used constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to answer the following main research question: How do students with MIoSG majoring in STEM experience and navigate campus learning environments and their disciplines/fields? This paper delves deeper into one of the findings from the larger study, which focuses on how college students with MIoSG encounter and experience opportunities for campus involvement.

Setting and Sample

Data for this paper comes from STEM students at three public and one private university in the United States. In grounded theory methods, researchers use purposeful initial sampling (Charmaz, 2014) to identify participants best able to answer the research question. Purposeful initial sampling (Charmaz, 2014) included identifying and inviting students with minoritized sexual and/or gender identities in STEM programs. Therefore, we sent our recruitment materials to the STEM academic departments and campus LGBTQ+ centers/organizations at the four collection sites and posted flyers around the campuses. The recruitment flyer included the following eligibility statement: Any student majoring in a STEM field whose gender and/or sexual identity is minoritized within American society. Having a minoritized gender and/or sexual identity means that at least one of the following two statements accurately describes you: 1) you do not identify as a cisgender woman or man; or 2) you do not identify as heterosexual. While we recognize the ongoing work to be done in relation to the oppression of women in STEM fields, due to our specific focus on interlocking oppressions rooted in cisheteropatriachy, we only accepted cisgender women participants if they also held a minoritized sexuality. Overall, 56 STEM students participated in the study, comprising 51 undergraduates and five graduate students.

We invited students to self-select all gender and sexuality terms that applied to them. Gender response options included Woman, Man, Transgender, Cisgender, Genderqueer, Not Listed (Please Specify); sexuality response options included Asexual, Bisexual, Gay, Heterosexual, Lesbian, Pansexual, Queer, Questioning, Not Listed (Please Specify). Participants reported their gender identities as: man (24), woman (18), cisgender (14), transgender (7), genderqueer (6), nonbinary (5), female (4), male (2), and agender (1). Sexual identities included: gay

(22), bisexual (18), pansexual (11), lesbian (7), asexual (4), queer (4), questioning (3), gray-asexual (2), dyke (1), gynophile (1), homoromantic (1), panromantic (1), straight (1), and woman-loving-woman (1). Racial demographics mirrored the predominantly white institutions where data were collected—with approximately 20% of the sample identifying as students of color. Racial identities for our sample included: Latinx (4), Black (4), Asian American (2), Arab/North African (1), bi-/multi-racial (2), Native American (2), South Asian (1), and white (45). Participants identified their STEM majors/fields as: engineering (29), computer science (9), biology (5), food science and nutrition (4), environmental science (2), marine science (2), neuroscience (2), kinesiology (1), mathematics (1), and natural resources (1).

Data Collection

We collected data using semi-structured, audio-recorded individual interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Semi-structured individual interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2011) are a commonly used technique within constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). A semi-structured interview protocol allows for slight variations in the phrasing and sequencing of questions to replicate the norms of a conversation (Charmaz, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). This form of data collection, however, still establishes sufficient structure to ensure that all participants are asked about the same set of topics core to the inquiry. Due to space constraints and the fact that our semi-structured approach led to questions being asked in a different order and with slightly different phrasing by each of the five interviewers, we do not share our complete protocol here. Instead, we provide examples of semi-structured questions that relate most directly to the topics presented in this article. The interview protocol included questions about student experiences regarding their gender and sexuality in college, in general, and in STEM fields, specifically. We asked questions such as: I'd like to ask you to tell me a little bit more about what it's like to be (gender/sexuality) on this campus and in your field. Participants were also asked: What types of activities are you involved on campus outside of class (employment, student organizations, research assistantships, etc.)? Data from these and other questions led to understandings of the experiences of students with MIoSG in relation to campus involvement, both within and beyond STEM programs.

Data Analysis

Per constructivist grounded theory, we began the data analysis process concurrently with collection and used constant comparative analysis (CCA) to structure this process (Charmaz, 2014). CCA is an iterative process of constantly comparing data points, emerging codes, and categories with the literature and study conclusions. In CCA, researchers begin by assigning initial and selective codes to the data. As our emergent codes and study conclusions pointed toward the importance of campus involvement, we compared our data to the literature and composed this paper to illuminate rich student experiences grounded in their responses and contextualized by the literature (cited earlier).

Our specific procedure is described here. We first analyzed data using an iterative grounded theory CCA process (Charmaz, 2014), assigning 100 initial open codes to the data. The purpose of initial codes is to sort and organize data into manageable segments. Following grounded theory initial coding processes, we assigned selective codes to synthesize initial codes into larger meanings grounded in participant narratives. Selective codes included involvement, lack of involvement, exclusion/stigma in involvement, resources used, campus resources not used, and campus climate for diversity. We concluded our process by analyzing our data in the context of involvement literature that recounts significant benefits to student success and retention (Astin, 1984, 1993; Komives, 2019; Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Vetter et al., 2019) and sociopolitical context (Peele, 2023). Through this final stage of our analytic process, we uncovered student narratives that revealed a complex picture of involvement in campus MIoSG organizations.

We used multiple qualitative strategies to establish trustworthiness and credibility, including discrepant case analysis, member checking, expert reviews, and scholar reflexivity on identity and power (Jones et al., 2021). These processes allowed us to ensure that our conclusions accurately described the complexity of involvement experiences from a diverse pool of 56 participants. These trustworthiness strategies also offered participants an opportunity to provide feedback about our emergent study themes through which we received affirmation from

participants that our themes adequately captured their lived experiences. We invited participants to give feedback at multiple points. First, all participants were invited to review transcripts for accuracy. Second, we emailed a document with our main emergent study categories and invited written feedback. Third, we invited participants to participate in the study. We also invited 25 STEM and MIoSG experts on three campuses to six separate presentations where we shared print copies and verbally summarized emergent categories and conclusions. They provided positive verbal feedback about the credibility and trustworthiness of our work.

As a research team, we engage in ongoing reflexivity in relation to our identity and positionality. Our team includes five of six authors holding a minoritized sexual and/or gender identity. All authors are active in social justice and student advocacy through research, administration, and/or teaching. Given that multiple authors of this paper self-identify as people with minoritized sexual or gender identities, we acknowledge the impact this undoubtedly had on participant recruitment and willingness to share personal experiences. At biweekly research team meetings, we used reflexivity to interrogate our privileged identities—namely, our team being predominantly white—and the impact our racial identities had on both our recruitment of participants and our analysis of our findings. We asked ourselves questions like: How might race, racism, and white privilege impact every aspect of our process (recruitment, collection, analysis, writing)? We engaged in tough conversations and called out one another if/when we believed whiteness was shaping any aspect of our process or product. We worked to mitigate study-related power through ongoing process consent before, during, and after the interview (e.g., thank you emails and member checking). We also addressed interviewer/interviewee power differentials by ensuring that none of the interviewers had a direct power-laden relationship with students (e.g., professor, advisor, and supervisor) on campus.

Limitations

Although we attempted to mitigate many of the challenges associated with our study, there are some areas where different choices could have strengthened our work. First, we focused this study broadly on STEM and campus experiences of MIoSG students, and involvement was one of the many topics covered in the interview protocol. Had this study focused exclusively on organizational involvement (including questions about the specific organizations at each campus), the findings may have been more complex. Second, our grounded theory methodology does not capture specific and detailed data about campus contexts (e.g., structures, policies, and climates) beyond the co-constructed notions of campus perceptions shared within the interviews. This could affect our ability to understand the importance of institutional context for participant experiences.

FINDINGS

In this section, we share the ways participants both had positive experiences, yet often encountered barriers related to engaging in MIoSG campus student groups. As readers engage with the narratives below, we encourage constant reflection on the temporal limits of this data and imagined present realities for the participants in this study.

Positive Involvement Experiences with MIoSG Groups on Campus

Many students discussed the positive effects participating in MIoSG-affirming spaces had on both their social and academic well-being. Given that many STEM spaces felt cis-heteropatriarchal and carried high academic stress, participants expressed relief in the ability to find a community that allowed them to feel safer to express themselves and provided a place of reprieve, an escape from the everyday struggles of their personal and academic lives.

One of the most prominent benefits of participating in MIoSG campus groups is finding a sense of community. Students discussed how a sense of community was important to both their mental well-being and in building a network of friends across academic spaces. For example, Lance, a gay man, mentioned how he felt the Gender and Sexuality Center on campus helped him relax from academia:

> The Gender and Sexuality Center is a nice place to go sometimes...I have a friend that works there, so I often go to events, things like that. And I guess it's a way to get away from the academic aspect a bit and just sort of relax a bit.

Jack, a gay man, discussed that it was only after finding a queer community on campus that he felt able to be more himself. Jack discussed how he made friends through the multiple clubs on campus that gave him the confidence to be himself in various spaces, regardless of who was around:

> A lot of my daily experiences and daily interactions now are with other queer people around campus. Especially with some of the organizations that I'm involved with. I've made more and more friends that are queer…so if I see them on campus, I am much more outward [in] who I am because I feel comfortable with them. I feel like I can do that, and I can be on top of the world with them, regardless of whether or not we're in the quad right out here, or if we're in a classroom or something. It's just easier because they're there with me, I guess.

Likewise, Flint, a gay cisgender man, spoke about how he found community in a group designated for queer students in the first year:

> It was very nice to have a little get-together club…that was just like other LGBT people, whether they were in my field or not, it was just like a nice escape, I guess. It was once a week I think maybe, maybe once or twice a week, but it was just very nice. It got me through the week and was something to do. I don't know. They always made me feel good. And nowadays when I go into the MRC (Multicultural Resource Center) and I see new people all the time walking in I'm like, 'I've seen you walking around campus, I never knew you were a part of the community.' It's always nice.

These quotes highlight the impacts of students' participation in groups on their sense of belonging on campus. These experiences also helped students further develop their social and communication skills, as participating in the organizations allowed them to grow in a safe environment. For example, Cato explains:

> I'm a super shy person, but when I went to Spectrum, they forced me to talk. So um, it's good. It's great, because you know, once you start talking it's just like…keeps going and going. That's how you make friends really.

Other participants found it difficult to find community and a sense of belonging but, through the interview process, began thinking that perhaps MIoSG campus groups could be a starting point in finding community. Finn shared:

> It's hard to network when you're a minority and you're looking for other people that are in the same boat with you…So, these student organizations that you've mentioned would probably be a great start.

Here, Finn expressed both the difficulty in finding community but also that he could perceive the benefits of participating in the groups mentioned in the interview.

Barriers to Involvement in MIoSG Groups on Campus

While many participants spoke to the positive impacts of involvement, many participants noted several barriers to participation in MIoSG-focused campus groups. These barriers ranged from personal concerns to structural issues of access. While participants often shared multiple overlapping barriers that affected their willingness and/or ability to get involved in campus MIoSG groups, we present them as categorized issues below to help identify specific areas of concern and move toward possible recommendations for campus activities coordinators.

Danger in Participation. Participants shared that they felt anxiety around participating in MIoSG-focused organizations, fears that ranged from outing oneself by being seen to having to go alone without the support of friends or other members in their community. Some participants shared issues related to visibility, as they felt being seen in MIoSG spaces could pose a potential threat to their academic and/or social networks. This is especially pertinent for students with MIoSG in STEM, as STEM spaces are particularly unwelcoming to those who identify as queer and trans, both at the academic (Miller et al., 2021b) and professional levels (Cech, 2017). While many faculty and administrators advocate broadly for more MIoSG visibility on campuses through orga-

nizations, the hiring of individuals with MIoSG, and MIoSG-focused events, individual visibility can be deemed as dangerous, and those with MIoSG often practice strategic invisibility as a choice of personal safety or political reasoning (Nicolazzo, 2019). Asha, a bisexual, pansexual, and queer woman, described her anxiety at seeing a classmate at a LBTQ+ Women's group:

> We both saw each other, and we're at the meeting, but after that, I'm nervous seeing her in class because in case conversations go that way, and I get nervous about what other people might think because it's definitely…a sort of thing. I don't think anyone in class would outright say something, but I think I wouldn't put [it past] people [to] talk about it behind my back or bring it up that way. So, it makes me nervous to talk to her now, which is stupid, and it shouldn't be that way, but yeah.

Here, Asha highlights the way that attending an event led to distress in her class as she attempted to balance finding community among the LBTQ+ Women's group with her decision to not be out publicly in her major, a space that she deemed as unsafe to her MIoSG. Asha highlights the connection between visibility and fear of being outed and or harmed (Nicolazzo, 2019), an aspect that requires STEM students with MIoSG to weigh elements of danger against their desire for community.

Several participants shared other safety concerns related to attending MIoSG groups alone. For example, Nia, a bisexual and questioning cisgender woman, initially described her lack of participation because she was unaware of what opportunities existed. However, as Nia began to explain, it became apparent that she also held anxiety about attending the meetings alone:

> In high school, I had my friends who knew and supported me. I even had some that went to clubs with me, and we were all on the executive board of the club and it was so great, and then I got here, and I didn't know anyone, so I didn't feel comfortable going to the meetings by myself. I tried to go to one by myself and everyone knew each other, and I was just standing there, and I was like, "Oh no." And I left. Panic. I'd like to go again, but again, I don't really have any LGB people who are anything other than heterosexual here, sad. Sad. If I did, I'm sure I'd go with them, but I don't really have any friends. Sad.

Nia's experience highlights the ways in which the transition from high school to college can be especially difficult for students who find it challenging to find community. For those with MIoSG, community can serve as a protective factor against harm, with a lack of community increasing experiences of danger. Familiarity and community can never assure complete protection for those with MIoSG, but it decreases the odds of individual targeted attacks on emotional, physical, and professional safety. In sum, several students reported varying levels of danger in being seen or going alone to MIoSG clubs and organizations–despite their desire to get involved and meet people.

Inactive Groups and Physical Space Constraints. Another notable barrier participants identified related to finding information about MIoSG campus groups was the accuracy of this information and the consistency of group meeting times and locations. Nolan, a gay cisgender man, described his disappointment in finding the clubs he was interested in joining were listed as inactive on the campus organizations website:

> When I went to orientation, we had split off from the main presentation into smaller groups that were led by students that already attend here and they had mentioned [a website] here to find all the organizations. It sounds silly but when I moved here, I barely know anyone here. I knew one person at this campus before I applied so the friend network is not very expansive right now, so I really made it a goal this semester to make at least five friends and I wanted some of them to be LGBT. I went to [the website where organizations are listed] to see if there were any LGBT groups and there's three and they're all inactive. They were from people that had graduated three or four years ago. I was like, oh well, there goes that.

What made Nolan's experience even more troubling was that many of these clubs were active, but the website on which they were listed had not been updated. Nolan had missed out on joining these organizations because a website served as a barrier for connection.

Kylie, a gay, lesbian, and queer cisgender woman, had a different frustration than Nolan. While Kylie's organization did exist, it was very hard to find a dedicated space to meet in. She said:

> Like for example, Spectrum. We just kind of meet in random rooms wherever there was room. One time we met in the theater. That was last semester, the only time they met. We're just kind of meeting in the room next to Einstein's bagels or one of the rooms in the union upstairs...We are so far behind in this state. Partially because we don't have things like a center for example, it's not that difficult. I mean how many rooms are there on campus? I mean with all the buildings and stuff you have on campus; how hard would it be to set up a room? It doesn't need to be huge. It just needs to be something.

Kylie's raw frustration can be read in this quote as she communicates how not having a steady meeting room feeds into her perception that her state is so far behind in supporting people with MIoSG. Kylie went on to mention that many of the MIoSG-related groups she participated in struggled to maintain steady involvement, resulting in disorganization and lack of consistency:

> This semester there's been one meeting so far (for a MIoSG group) and I was one of four people who showed up. I've tried to get involved with Spectrum. The problem is that group is going through a lot of changes right in this moment. Last semester they were just dead. They did one meeting and then we're dead. This semester, they have done one meeting and I don't know what happened to a secondary meeting that was supposed to happen. I didn't hear anything.

Aldo, a pansexual man, spoke to many of the same concerns as Kylie and Nolan. While Aldo did discuss how an MIoSG group he was part of helped him make friends, he also described how the disorganization of the clubs led to difficulty in being involved:

> I would describe it as a lot less connected, I think, than I thought, just because it seems like there's not really ... besides the LGBT Center, it's hard to interact with other LGBT groups or coordinate with them. I have had friendships with LGBT people on campus, but generally they're just random relationships. They're not really through any program or organization.

Simple actions by faculty, administration, and staff could help alleviate some of these barriers. For example, Camila, a lesbian, queer, dyke, gay woman, shared her experience in wanting to start her own MIoSG campus group. She received the support of professors but was empowered herself to organize and run it:

> I organized everything, but they (the professors) helped reserving the space and everything, and it was great, because a lot of people showed up, so I'm really happy about it. It turned out really well. Yeah, so that was actually really, really cool.

Camila's example highlights the ways in which students can, and should, have agency over their own clubs and organizations, but through the support of those in positions of power at the university, they can more effectively handle the logistical hurdles of areas such as space.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Involvement literature touts the benefits of student participation in clubs and organizations (Astin, 1984, 1993; Komives, 2019; Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Vetter et al., 2019). Some of our data align with these prior works to show that students can have positive experiences, build community, and find an escape from their academic stressors when participating in campus organizations designed for MIoSG students. Given the socio-political context of anti-MIoSG legislation across the U.S. (Peele, 2023),

campus organizations for MIoSG students may play an increasingly important role as safe spaces within the larger campus and community context of MIoSG oppression. We find this point especially salient given that these data were collected prior to the recent influx of anti-MIoSG policies. At the time of data collection, participants came from varying sociopolitical contexts ranging from rural conservative to urban liberal spaces, and their experiences varied in alignment with these contexts. While the U.S. has historically held geographical pockets of relative safety for students with MIoSG, current political shifts are creating increasingly tenuous spaces for students with MIoSG. As such, these findings illuminate that the nuanced barriers to involvement in MIoSG (and non-MIoSG) organizations are more important than ever.

Our findings also align with limited literature that suggests the benefits of campus involvement are complicated for students with MIoSG (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; McKinney, 2005; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Our data suggest that students worried about being outed or experienced anxiety about attending meetings and events alone. Students with MIoSG often find themselves positioned as responsible for educating others on what is problematic and harmful in relation to their identities in collegiate spaces (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017), adding to the anxiety many students might already feel when entering new spaces. Moreover, our data align with prior research suggesting the ways in which intersecting identities can further complicate involvement experiences for students with MIoSG (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011), especially students within STEM. The students interviewed in this study often spoke to the added complexity of holding a MIoSG in STEM, as they often needed to seek spaces outside of their major to find community; however, they were simultaneously nervous to be spotted by those within their major while participating in affinity organizations. In the following section, we offer recommendations for student affairs professionals to enhance the benefits of MIoSG involvement while minimizing the challenges experienced by our participants.

In alignment with prior literature (Vaccaro & Newman, 2017), our participants noted sense of community and belonging to be the most common benefits of MIoSG organizations. In this current sociopolitical environment, where anti-MIoSG legislation is proliferating, one of the most important things involvement professionals can do is ensure that clubs and organizations for students with MIoSG continue to operate on campus. Campus activities professionals are on the front lines of helping students identify involvement opportunities, providing logistical support (e.g., budget, officer elections, space reservations) for campus organizations. Professionals also have an important role in advocating for the importance of identity-based organizations to campus leaders who may be indifferent or hostile to such organizations. We hope that student voices in this paper about the benefits of MIoSG organizations provide an impetus for campus activities professionals to challenge campus efforts to close or defund organizations for MIoSG students.

Fear of being outed is real. Given the U.S. sociopolitical landscape (Peele, 2023), student affairs professionals must recognize the inherent dangers mentioned by our participants about being outed on campus as a result of MIoSG involvement. As advisors, campus activities professionals can work with MIoSG organizations to develop guidelines for participation. This might include creating community norms at the beginning of each semester where students can share their expectations on identity sharing, comfort with outness, and hopes for interactions beyond the group setting. Advisors may need to regularly remind leadership (who are often composed of out activists) that not all students with MIoSG are comfortable being publicly out. Advisors can also work with student leaders to engage in activism to fight systems of oppression on and off campus in a way that honors the outness comfort levels of all members of the organization. Additionally, advisors can work alongside STEM professors to help educate and support professors in creating a safer and more welcoming STEM environment.

Students in our study reported anxiety about going alone to MIoSG clubs and organizations–despite their desire to get involved and meet people. Campus activities professionals can develop programs and initiatives to respond to this fear–such as hosting new member nights where potential new members are welcomed into the fold. Or resident assistants can host programs where they invite groups of students to attend MIoSG events or meetings on campus. This way, students are not walking to a meeting alone.

Students like Nia teach us that new attendees can feel like outsiders when everyone in the group already knows each other. Advisors can work with student organization leaders and members to develop meeting practices (e.g., introductions, get-to-know-you activities) at the beginning of each meeting so that all new attendees feel included. Advisors can also remind current members of how important it is to be intentional about welcoming new members into the community.

Some of our participants were excited to participate in identity-affirming student organizations upon arrival to campus. Unfortunately, students like Kylie often get excited about joining a student organization, only to find out that the club is inactive. Student affairs professionals must keep better track of and publicize which clubs and organizations are operational, when they are meeting, and who the officers are. Websites or programs like OrgSync can be incredible resources–only if they are kept up to date with contact and meeting information. We also contend that it is important for student affairs professionals to ensure that identity-based groups flourish on campus–especially when there is a change in leadership or a new school year. Sometimes campus activities professionals take a hands-off approach to organizations–letting them ebb and flow as student leadership and interests increase and/or wane. Given the student voices in this paper, we propose that student affairs professionals might want to take a more hands-on approach to ensure that identity-based groups do not go defunct. This might mean providing extra support and advising for clubs, encouraging leadership training and succession, and possibly additional funding to ensure that these organizations do not end up inactive. Finally, campus activities professionals can work collaboratively with student leaders and gender and sexuality centers to intentionally advertise organizations and foster interest and attendance at meetings.

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JCAPS

DEVELOPING STUDENT LEADER EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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While improving ability to communicate effectively is a given for developing student leadership potential, there are very few systematic frameworks to guide communication skill improvement. Using a model of emotional and social skills derived from research in interpersonal and emotional/nonverbal communication, tools and strategies for both assessing possession of complex and sophisticated social/communication skills and their development are discussed. This well-researched model breaks down complex communication into well-defined skills that underlie the more abstract leadership competencies of emotional and social intelligences. It provides a foundation for enhancing the emotional and social skills of students that lead them to be more effective in positions of leadership, and in social interactions more generally. Specific strategies for communication skill development are suggested, as well as discussion of formal guides and resources to aid in student leadership development.

What is the single most important activity in which leaders are engaged in their day-to-day work? Henry Mintzberg (1973), in his detailed studies of managers/leaders, found that the vast majority of a leader's day is spent communicating – with followers, superiors, peers, customers, and other stakeholders. This highlights an essential area for any leader development program – improving the leader's ability to communicate in ways that are clear, concise, credible, sophisticated, and accessible to others. This is particularly important for students who are still learning how to communicate effectively as nascent leaders. A foundation of basic communication skills is an important starting point for developing more complex leader competencies. This paper presents a model for assessing and developing basic communication/social skills and applies these to the development of student leaders.

While there are many programs available for enhancing specific communication skills, such as effective writing strategies, public speaking guides, active listening tactics, and the like, a more comprehensive strategy is to work to develop the basic, underlying skills for all means of leader communication. Drawing on research from the fields of communication, social psychology, and emotions, Riggio and colleagues (Riggio, 1986, 2014; Riggio & Carney, 2003; Riggio, et al., 2003) developed a model for basic emotional and social communication skills (described below). Using this model provides a framework for focusing on specific elements of leader communication skills that can be targeted for development. These basic communication skills become the building blocks for more sophisticated forms of communication. Research has demonstrated that they are related to both leader emergence (i.e., the attainment of leadership positions) and leader effectiveness. Communication skills are also related to effectiveness as a follower or team member, so developing them can benefit anyone.

THE BASIC SOCIAL SKILLS MODEL

According to the Social Skills Model, there are three basic forms of interpersonal communication – sending (i.e., encoding), receiving (i.e., decoding), and regulating or controlling the expression of messages. These same communication skills operate in two domains: the emotional/nonverbal domain, and the verbal/social domain, creating six basic communication skills. Table 1 outlines these basic skills and suggests how these might apply to leadership.

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Table 1. *Basic Social/Communication Skills and Relationships to Leadership*

Skills	Description	Relationship to Leadership
Emotional/Nonverbal Skills		
Emotional Expressiveness	Skill in sending/encoding emotional and nonverbal messages, emotions, attitudes, and cues of dominance.	Related to charismatic leadership; important in motivating/inspiring followers; conveying positive affect, authenticity, and regard.
Emotional Sensitivity	Skill in receiving/decoding others' emotional and nonverbal messages.	Key to understanding followers' feelings, needs, and establishing rapport; being empathic.
Emotional Control	Skill in controlling and regulating emotional and nonverbal displays; masking felt emotions; ability to enact emotions (combined with emotional expressiveness).	Critical for controlling/stifling strong emotions; regulating emotions in self and others; impression formation.
Social/Verbal Skills		
Social Expressiveness	Skill in verbal expression; the ability to engage others in social discourse.	Public speaking/presentations; being persuasive; coaching.
Social Sensitivity	Skill in interpreting verbal/written communication; ability to understand/decode social situations; knowledge of social norms and roles.	Active Listening; regulating/monitoring oneself and others' behaviors.
Social Control	Skill in social role-playing and social self-presentation.	Leader impression management; being tactful; related to sense of leader and social self-efficacy.

Emotional/nonverbal skills involve the ability to send, receive, and regulate emotional and other nonverbal messages. These are the underlying skills discussed in the "ability models" of "emotional intelligence" (e.g., Caruso, et al., 2002; Mayer, et al., 2002). These basic emotional communication skills are related to both charismatic and transformational leadership (as well as other forms of exemplary leadership) because they serve to help the leader to inspire and motivate others by infusing communication with emotions. In fact, it has been suggested that emotional expressiveness is a major element of a leader's "charisma" (Bass, 1990; Riggio, 1987). Emotional sensitivity is related to the ability to "read" the subtle, emotional messages sent by others, and is crucial in developing leader empathy. Finally, the ability to regulate one's emotions – emotional control – allows a leader to regulate and control strongly felt emotions, which is very important when a leader is in a stressful or emotionally evocative situation. In addition, possessing good emotional communication skills of all three types leads to the development of better interpersonal interactions, which is particularly important in establishing good leader-follower relationships.

The verbal/social skills of social expressiveness, social sensitivity, and social control are even more important to leadership effectiveness. Whereas emotional skills are related to emotional intelligence, these social skills are the underlying building blocks of social intelligence. These social-communication skills allow leaders to not only communicate accurately in face-to-face, virtual (e.g., Zoom meetings), and in written exchanges, but they are also related to being socially aware and tactful in a leader's interactions with followers and other stakeholders. Two of these skills – social expressiveness and social control (i.e., sophisticated social role-playing skill) – have been relabeled *savoir-faire*, which translates to "knowing how to be" in relationships and social situations (Riggio, et al., 2020). A much fuller treatment of the relationship between emotional and social skills and leadership is provided in Riggio and Reichard (2008), which outlines the connections between emotional and social skills and emotional intelligence and suggests why these basic communication skills are critical for developing leader emotional intelligence.

These basic communication skill dimensions can also interact with one another. It is not simply a "more is better" approach. Balance among the various communication skills is also important. For example, emotional

expressiveness – the ability to spontaneously express one's felt emotions – should be tempered with emotional control in order to avoid coming on too strong emotionally. Similarly, strong emotional control without emotional expressiveness leads to the impression that the individual is emotionally distant, or unfeeling. Therefore, in developing these basic communication skills, it is critical to not only work on developing each of the six basic components, but it is also important to consider how they interact with one another to create truly sophisticated, and high-level communication skills.

By studying the basic communication skill model and understanding how the different dimensions interact, a trained staff member can often observe both deficits in a student's communication skills, and provide feedback, as well as notice when these problematic skill interactions are occurring. Students themselves, trained in the communication skill model, can serve as reciprocal peer mentors to provide feedback to one another about observed strengths and limitations in their classmates' communication skills.

ASSESSING AND DEVELOPING SOPHISTICATED LEADER COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Using these basic emotional and social skill dimensions to improve leader communication skills operates something like a traditional competency model. By breaking these skills down into their most basic elements and focusing on each skill individually, a framework is created to guide development. For example, emotional communication skills, such as emotional expressiveness and emotional sensitivity, are developed through paying attention to nonverbal cues, particularly facial expressions, tone of voice, and body movements/gestures, and working to develop skill in both expressing and decoding these "body language" cues. In fact, research shows that emotional expressiveness and emotional sensitivity are correlated (Riggio, 1986), suggesting that when it comes to basic emotional communication, good senders of emotion are also good receivers/decoders (i.e., it "takes one to know one"). These can be developed in tandem.

A good starting point is to assess current levels of these basic social-communication skills, either informally, through gaining a deeper understanding of the constructs and reflecting on a student's possession of the different skill dimensions. This can be done observationally, or more accurately, through the validated and well-researched self-report Social Skills Inventory (SSI; Riggio & Carney, 2003). The SSI is a 90-item instrument, with 15 items assessing each of the six basic communication skill dimensions. An SSI profile can also identify any communication skill imbalances [The SSI is available through Mindgarden https://www.mindgarden.com/144-social-skills-inventory]. In any communication skill development program based on this model, it is important to continue assessment, either formally or informally, through staff or peer feedback. There is an other-rated version of the SSI in development that can assist with providing students formal feedback concerning the improvement of particular communication skills.

With this ongoing feedback, student leaders can realize where their communication skill strengths and weaknesses lie, and, as in any competency model, be motivated to capitalize on strengths and work to develop any deficiencies. Let's look at what an informal, self-paced program of developing these basic communication skills would look like.

Any competency program begins with assessment. An informal assessment would involve guided self-reflection. What are some areas of communication that are difficult for you? Have individuals close to you pointed out any areas where your communication falls short? These might include such things as a loved one or trusted colleague saying that the student seems "emotionally distant" or "unempathetic," suggesting that emotional skills need work. It might be that the student has difficulties in public speaking or seems "socially awkward" in certain situations, reflecting issues in verbal/social skill communication. This assessment would help identify areas for targeted improvement.

Exercises for improving emotional and nonverbal communication include gaining greater insight into the feeling and expression of emotion, with videorecording of students enacting emotions. This serves as a means for

both identifying deficiencies, as well as for documenting improvement over time. Developing emotional sensitivity could include exercises in identifying facial expressions of others' emotions and simply observing others' behavior with an eye toward decoding what they are feeling. More formally, encouraging students to take acting classes can help develop emotional communication skills, which are beneficial in injecting emotions into interpersonal interactions. Practice giving prepared and spontaneous videotaped presentations, such as a leader giving a motivational speech or giving feedback to another student, are good practices for improving both emotional and verbal expressiveness.

Social expressiveness, which includes verbal communication skills, can be developed through a student taking a course in public speaking or joining a group such as Toastmasters, but it can also be developed in workshops or informally through recording speeches with the student working to eliminate speech disturbances that detract from good oral communication (the "uhs," long pauses, incomplete sentences, etc.). Using opportunities to hone conversational skills, such as talking to people at social gatherings and networking sessions, and initiating discussions with strangers, are also good ways for students to develop this critical communication skill.

Similar to emotional sensitivity, social sensitivity is developed through improving one's observational skills – paying closer attention to the social skills that tell you something about others. Another aspect of social sensitivity involves understanding and adhering to the social norms for particular groups in order to "get along" better with different types of people. For example, a leader needs to understand where followers are coming from in order to connect with them in a meaningful way. Adapting to what is appropriate behavior in a particular group, culture, or situation, is the key to social (and cultural) intelligence (i.e., knowing how to fit in). Additional exercises for students to develop elements of social sensitivity can be created (see Riggio & Merlin, 2011, for ideas).

Social Control, or sophisticated social role-playing skill, is critical for leadership, simply because leadership is a complex social role. Any acting/role-playing exercises will help develop social control. Another strategy is to have students analyze their own behavior in various social situations, and do an "after-action review." Helping students to analyze what they did in a particular situation and reflect on how it was received by others is one discussion-based exercise. Questions such as "What was the outcome?" "What could you have done better?" can lead to students becoming more proactive when going into social (or leadership) situations. Essentially, teaching students to plan ahead and anticipate how their actions will affect others are important components of the sophisticated skill of Social Control. Preparing for different social scenarios and outcomes can help build students' self-confidence, which makes them look more poised and in charge.

EVIDENCE THAT SOPHISTICATED COMMUNICATION SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR LEADERSHIP

The Social Skills Model was initially created as a research tool and then later used to guide communication skill development for all types of individuals, including students. It was in this initial research that connections to social effectiveness (and, eventually, leadership) were made. For example, in initial studies, persons who possessed more of these basic social/communication skills were found to have larger and more supportive social networks (Riggio & Zimmerman, 1991). These social skills were also connected to higher incidences of social engagement with others, and better psychosocial adjustment (Riggio, et al., 1993). Social skills were also related to making a more positive impression in initial encounters, in job interviews, and to impression formation, more generally (Riggio, 1986; Riggio, et al., 2020; Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988).

Although the emotional skills outlined in the model are associated with higher levels of emotional intelligence and are critically important for leaders in developing strong interpersonal relationships with followers and peers, the most consistent skill predictors of effective leadership are the combination of social expressiveness and social control, what Riggio and colleagues (2020) have labeled *savoir-faire*. These two social skills, which are perhaps the best predictors of an individual's level of social intelligence, are related to the student leader's ability to effectively enact the role of leader, and to appear poised and confident. In one study, it was found that these same social skill dimensions mediated the relationship between extraversion and leadership potential, suggesting that

the so-called "extraversion advantage" in leadership emergence and effectiveness cannot happen unless the individual also possesses high levels of critical social communication skills (Guerin, et al., 2011). This argues for the importance of developing students' communication skills, particularly for students who may not be naturally inclined to take on leadership roles.

Some leadership research has focused on the total score of the SSI, with the assumption that greater possession of *all* of the basic communication skills can increase leadership potential. In experimental studies with students, this total score did indeed predict who would be selected as leaders in student teams (i.e., leader emergence), and SSI-total score predicted more effective leadership, particularly on tasks that required team members to work together (Riggio, et al., 2003). In another study, SSI-total scores were higher for top-level leaders in the fire service than for captains (who would be the equivalent of middle managers). From a more "applied" perspective, for decades, the SSI has been used for identifying persons with exceptional communication skills for both leadership positions, and for other occupations that require high-level social skills (e.g., counselors, negotiators, etc.).

RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING LEADER EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

As mentioned, the primary tool for assessing the basic communication skill dimensions is the Social Skills Inventory. The SSI, and a manual (Riggio & Carney, 2003) that presents research evidence supporting the instrument, as well as scoring and interpretation instructions, are available through test publisher Mind Garden (www.mindgarden.com). There are a number of informal strategies for improving emotional and social skills in various publications (Riggio, 1987; Riggio, 2014; Riggio & Reichard, 2008). In addition, there is a guidebook of exercises designed specifically for training professionals (Riggio & Merlin, 2011) that is full of ideas and methods for developing clients' and students' communication skills – all based on the Social Skills Model.

A program for developing sophisticated communication skills should begin with an overview of the skills model, followed up by some sort of assessment of students' existing skills in each area. Exercises should be used to focus on each of the skill dimensions, and to increase students' awareness of how they are communicating. For example, a simple exercise for helping students understand nonverbal/emotional expressiveness and sensitivity is to have them pair up, face each other, and try to communicate basic emotions (e.g., happiness, anger, sadness, fear) using only nonverbal cues of the face and tone of voice, while holding the verbal content constant ("A, B, C, D, E, F, G"). This gives some initial indication of success/errors in the transmission and receiving of nonverbal cues of emotion. Moving from simple communication exercises to more complex ones is a good strategy. "Homework" assignments to try out on their own time are an important part of any student communication skill program, as is ongoing feedback. In one doctoral dissertation, it was found that students who underwent social skill training based on the SSI model were rated as more "charismatic" following the training sessions (Taylor, 2002).

Some basic rules for developing these sophisticated communication and social skills for student leaders are the same ones for any leadership development program: (1) initial assessment of skill strengths and weaknesses and targeting of skills for development; (2) structured exercises for strengthening the targeted skills; (3) following up on structured training with homework assignments that allow the individual to practice communication skills in everyday life; (4) ongoing assessment of skill improvement and constructive feedback.

CONCLUSION

Communication is a critical skill for developing leaders. All too often, programs to develop students' leadership skills are done in a piecemeal fashion – focusing on one skill or another (e.g., effective/active listening, public speaking, networking, etc.). There are relatively few integrated frameworks for developing social and communication skills. Based on a well-researched model of emotional and social communication skills, student development staff are encouraged to develop a unified program that promotes student leaders' ability to communicate more effectively. The Social Skills Model introduced here incorporates the constructs of emotional and social intelligences and focuses on the underlying building blocks of sophisticated leader communication skills.

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