
University Fraternity and Sorority Staffing Practices: Effect on Student Success

Background

In the spring of 2020 the Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform (Piazza Center), the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA), and the Postsecondary Education Research Center (PERC), partnered to study the effects of staffing practices in offices of fraternity and sorority life on fraternity and sorority chapter member outcomes. The purpose of this project was to determine how data related to fraternity/sorority life could be captured and reported to improve student success. The research team sought to address the impact of staffing on positive and negative chapter and council outcomes. Specifically, we wanted to learn if a ratio of staff to student or chapter correlates to positive and negative chapter outcomes.

Summary of Findings

The preliminary findings in this report are an early indication that there is a potential relationship between staffing models and chapter level outcomes. Overall, the results suggest that the staffing model, both size and structure, may impact specific elements of the chapter experience. From this study, there is evidence of a positive correlation between the percentage of time the senior staff member (e.g. Associate Director, Director, Assistant/Associate Dean) of an office dedicated to fraternity and sorority responsibilities and chapter member GPA. However, the study is inconclusive if the ratio of staff to students or chapters is a determinate of the outcomes versus other factors such as the time a senior staff member dedicates to fraternity and sorority life. Furthermore, the analysis revealed a positive correlation between graduate student advising staff size and reported chapter community service hours, although more in-depth analysis is warranted to explore this finding. Further exploratory work is underway to determine correlations and conclusions between staffing size and structure and chapter level outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the available data from the existing self-reported surveys and the number of campuses that have reported data to one or more research surveys in the study. As both the AFA Institutional Survey and National Fraternity and Sorority Scorecard projects are new instruments there is an opportunity to enhance both projects to refine questions and response items. Additionally, there needs to have a larger participation in the National Fraternity and Sorority Scorecard project to fully understand the dependent and independent variables proposed in this study.

Future Work

The research team sees a possibility in creating a correlation of the staffing size to the outcomes of the fraternity and sorority experience with more data. In particular, we would like to replicate and validate both the initial findings and to investigate other variables that may be a stronger determinate of the health of a chapter. Adding new variables such as staff longevity, persistence/retention rates, and more nuanced conduct reports may also shed light on the interconnection of staffing models and chapter/community outcomes. Furthermore, the research

University Fraternity and Sorority Staffing Practices

team is committed to exploring practices which may improve chapter outcomes among National Pan-Hellenic Council, National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations, National Multicultural Greek Council, and National Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Panhellenic Association. This question leads to a larger inquiry regarding the impact of outcomes as they relate to a professional's percentage of time devoted to a particular council within their job responsibility. A future study could also understand the impact of COVID-19 on staffing. Moving forward, we emphasize the importance of conducting rigorous mixed methods analyses which explore trends in data but also include the qualitative lived experiences of chapter members and staff from all fraternity and sorority councils and backgrounds.

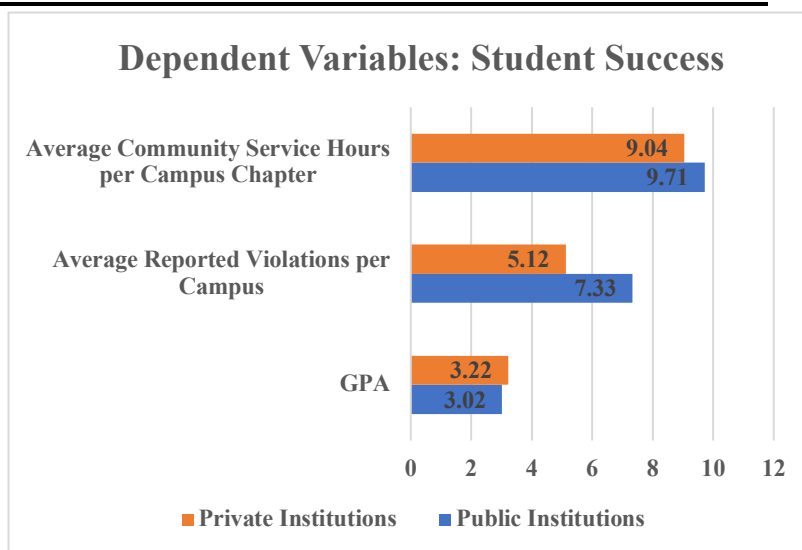
Research Process

Over the course of the study a representative team comprised of the Piazza Center, AFA research committee, and PERC researchers met monthly to guide the exploratory work. The team assisted in encouraging participation in data collection, adding variables, focusing research questions, adjusting timelines, and editing reports.

Data for this study are derived from 68 institutions and the following three surveys from the spring of 2018. The survey project included the AFA's Institutional Survey (IS), the Piazza Center's National Fraternity/Sorority Scorecard Survey (NFSS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Data from the three databases were combined into one database for the purposes of this study. Specifically, the team reviewed the variables from the IS, NFSS, and IPEDs included in the database to determine what questions could be answered based on the data.

Dependent Variables

To determine the dependent variables - or the variables that are affected in the analysis - the research team looked for what variables best represented "student success" from the three preexisting datasets previously mentioned. Dependent variables were chosen due to the documented effect on student success outcomes and the ability of the database to accurately measure these variables (see Sasso, Biddix, & Miranda, 2020; Biddix, Matney, & Norman, 2014). The research team identified the three dependent variables included: *grade point average, conduct violations, and community service hours*. See future plans to expand the survey for more robust measurements of student success.



University Fraternity and Sorority Staffing Practices

Independent Variables

Independent variables are variables included in an analysis which may or may not impact the dependent variables. The purpose of including independent variables is to determine what influences the measures for student success. For this study, the research team identified seven independent variables: *public (n=49) or private (n=19) institutional classification, ratio of campus students who are fraternity/sorority members, staff to member ratio, graduate staff to member ratio, percent of time dedicated by senior staff member to fraternity/sorority duties, title level of senior staff, and institution size.*

VARIABLE	MEAN/AVERAGE	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
<i>RATIO OF CAMPUS STUDENTS WHO ARE FRATERNITY/SORORITY MEMBERS</i>	170/1000 (17%)	1/1000 (.1%)	860/1000 (86%)
<i>PERCENT TIME DEDICATED TO ROLE</i>	67.7%	10%	100%
<i>FT STAFF/MEMBER RATIO</i>	2 per 1000 Members	.27 per 1000 Members	8 per 1000 Members
<i>GRAD STAFF/MEMBER RATIO</i>	.7 per 1000 Members	0 per 1000 Members	4 per 1000 Members
<i>INSTITUTION SIZE</i>	14,315	877	53,743
<i>TITLE LEVEL OF SENIOR STAFF</i>	Assistant/Associate Director (75%)	Coordinator (11%)	Dean Level (14%)

Analysis

The research team conducted three separate regression analyses to determine the relationship or effect the independent variables had on the three dependent variables. Due to limitations in sample size and the self-reported nature of the data, the strength of the significant relationships observed in our analysis was small. The results of the analyses are presented in the table on page 4.

Use the following key to read the table on page 4:



Indicates a positive relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This means that according to the model and data, as one increases so will the other.



Indicates a negative relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This means that according to the model and data, as one decreases the other will increase.



Indicates no relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This means that according to the model, there was no observed effect.

University Fraternity and Sorority Staffing Practices

Results

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
	GPA	Violations	Community Service
<i>Ratio of Campus Students who are Fraternity/Sorority Members</i>	≠	≠	↑
<i>Percent Time Dedicated to Role</i>	↑	≠	≠
<i>FT Staff/Member Ratio</i>	≠	↑	≠
<i>Grad Staff/Member Ratio</i>	≠	≠	↑
<i>Institution Size</i>	↓	≠	≠
<i>Title Level of Senior Staff</i>	≠	≠	≠
<i>Public Institution</i>	↓	≠	≠

Key Findings

The following four finds were derived from combining the data sets. It is important to note that when there is more data, further analysis can and should be conducted to first see if the results are reliable and second to reanalyze independent and dependent variables to explore the ratio of staff to positive and negative outcomes. Four signs there is a correlation between staffing structure and size include:

1. The proportion of chapter violations is positively related to the full-time staff and chapter member ratio.

Implication: This finding implies that the higher the ratio of full-time staff and chapter members increases the amount of conduct violations reported. This finding may indicate that increasing the amount of staff results in increased conduct reporting among fraternity and sorority members.

2. Fraternity and sorority average chapter GPA is positively related to whether the senior staff member dedicates over 50% of their time to fraternity and sorority life.

Implication: Offices in which the senior staff member dedicated over 50% of their time to fraternity and sorority life had a higher average GPA. Further research is needed to explore the connection between senior staff members who are able to dedicate the majority of their time to duties related to fraternity and sorority life and student success outcomes.

3. The average amount of community service hours by chapter is positively related to the ratio of graduate student employees.

Implication: This finding implies that graduate student advisors have a positive influence on service, which may be related to the additional support, or emphasis on service they are able to provide. Increasing both graduate staff and providing intentional opportunities for them to engage with fraternity and sorority members about service opportunities may be a beneficial way to facilitate, emphasize, and track service.

4. Fraternity and sorority average chapter GPA is not related to the ratio of either full-time or graduate student staff and chapter members.

Implication: This finding suggests no direct link between staff and chapter GPA, which suggests institutional efforts to support chapter scholarship are not effective. Additional research into factors that positively impact GPA, such as peer mentors, organized study sessions, and chapter-sponsored academic development programs is warranted to better understand potential influencers.

University Fraternity and Sorority Staffing Practices

Contact Information

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References

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