About the Author: I am a senior finishing up my last semester at UIUC. I will be graduating in December 2007. My major is Molecular and Cellular Biology. Currently, I am preparing for the MCAT and plan to start medical school during the fall of 2009. I am a member of the first Co-Ed Latino fraternity on campus called Alpha Psi Lambda as well as a member of the Latin dance group Dance 2XS Caliente. This is my first time doing an ethnography research paper; I do have experience doing scientific research. I was a McNair Scholar during the summer of 2005 here at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Keywords: greek, fraternity, sorority, culture, african american, asian, caucasian, latino, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, UIUC

Abstract: The Greek System here at the university really has an impact on student life both in the lives of Greeks and non-Greeks. Little research has been conducted on Greeks of different ethnicities and I believe it is important to see what are these differences and similarities among all Greeks to get a better perception of where there are gaps of understanding. When I say understanding, I mean understanding how these students perceive themselves, their organization, their school, and the rest of the student body. Hopefully this paper will contribute towards finding ways that the university can use to bridge these gaps so students can learn to understand each other better and discontinue isolating themselves from the rest of the student body. For this study, one male and one female from four ethnic groups were interviewed, so there were two African American, two Asian, two Caucasian, and two Latino students. All of my participants were undergraduates that were members of the Greek System. Four came from the United Greek Council, two from the Black Greek Council, one from the Panhellenic Council, and one from the Interfraternity Council. The purpose was to get the point of view of females and males from different ethnic groups that are in Greek organizations here at U of I.

Initial Exercises: Perspective on the University

The first time I learned about the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was during the fall of my senior year in high school. A recruiter from the university named Asa Gordon came to my English class with pamphlets and brochures; he was an active speaker and easily caught everyone’s attention. He started out by asking the class what did we know about U of I. Most of us had heard about U of I but we did not know much about it. He told us about the application process, what life is like on
campus, the reputation of the university, and he concluded by explaining how he came to terms with his career decision. After listening to his presentation, I realized that U of I was an excellent school that had much to offer. I kept in touch with Mr. Gordon to ask him questions about the application process. I was impressed by his attentiveness to follow up with me during this process and even after I was accepted.

I thought that although the university was large with many students and many perspectives, the university was doing a great job at paying attention to the students. I was not the first one in my family to attend college, but I was the first one to leave home to live on campus. Everything was very new to me and I did not have a family member or a friend to explain to me what I was to expect. Fortunately, I was placed randomly with a good roommate, my advisor had set me up with a good schedule, and the dorm that I was placed in was very interactive with its tenants. During my years at U of I, I learned to be independent and found that in order to succeed in this university one must really put forth the effort to be involved, do well in school, and make connections with other students and staff. U of I has much to offer and it really can be up to the student how they want to make their college life experience.

Meal Observation

This meal was prepared by two of my roommates Monday night. They prepared Spanish rice, seasoned pork, and cream of cauliflower. My first assumption before the meal preparation was that X was going to do most of the work because she is a skilled cook who plans to open her own restaurant one day. Y however is not much of a cook, but does know how to do a few basic tasks. I knew that they would not feel uncomfortable with me watching and recording them because they are accustomed to seeing me sitting on the couch either reading, writing, or on my laptop computer. During the start of the meal preparation the girls were joking while taking out the ingredients from the refrigerator and cabinets. Y’s task was simple, she only had to cut up the vegetables while X turned on the stove and measured the ingredients she would put in the pots and pan. While they were doing these tasks, they both seemed relaxed with each other and with me observing them. They joked around most of the time and enjoyed sharing stories. At a few points they asked me about an encounter X and I had shared the day before. X was moving the most from the refrigerator, the sink, the counter, to the stove. Y stood in place while she did the cutting.

Eventually Y left the kitchen and sat on the couch facing the TV. X stayed in the kitchen to add the ingredients to the pots and pan. While Y and X were in the separate rooms they kept conversing about the show “Rock of Love”. At this point I noticed that the apartment was getting warmer and the smells of the food were intensifying. X left the kitchen and walked over to the couch that Y was sitting on. Y decided to switch to DVD mode with
the remote to watch the DVD of Friends that was already inside the DVD player. They sat and watched two episodes of friends while they discussed how they felt about the exam they both had earlier. Occasionally they would focus their attention to the TV and laugh during a few scenes of the episode of friends. After twenty-five minutes X stood up and headed towards the stove to check on the rice and to turn off the two other stove tops. She continued to mix, cut, and stir the food. Eventually X announced that dinner was ready and that each person should serve their’ own plate. Usually she serves us when she cooks, but today was a long day for her and she wanted us to do some work too.

Illinois Story

In some ways, I do believe that the University has progressed enormously towards becoming a more diverse institution that promotes success for its students. However, there are still many areas that need improvement. After reading the outlined narratives concerning diversity initiatives, plans to improve higher education, purpose of the university, and so forth, I am pleased that the state and the university are taking action towards making changes. I don’t foresee drastic changes occurring anytime soon, but hopefully as people get more involved among the policy makers, administration, academia, and students, real change can start manifesting. The two narratives that stood out to me were A Citizen’s Agenda for Illinois Higher Education and the Final Report from the Diversity Initiatives Committee.

In 1998, the State of Illinois Board of Higher Education created an agenda for higher education that was meant to reach its goals by 2008. Called the Illinois Commitment, it included:

1. Higher education will help Illinois business and industry sustain strong economic growth.
2. Higher education will join elementary and secondary education to improve teaching and learning at all levels.
3. No Illinois citizen will be denied an opportunity for a college education because of financial need.
4. Illinois will increase the number and diversity of citizens completing training and education programs.
5. Illinois colleges and universities will hold students to even higher expectations for learning and will be accountable for the quality of academic programs and the assessment of learning.
6. Illinois colleges and universities will continually improve productivity, cost-effectiveness, and accountability.

I am not sure if the Illinois Commitment has reached all of its goals in the way they were intended, but for what I do know concerning these goals, I have seen many graduates that have either returned or have decided to work in low-income neighborhoods in Illinois where their training and education is being put to good use. However, most of these graduates
have moved either to Chicago or the suburbs of Chicago, so I cannot say how this is affecting other parts of Illinois. Financial aid has done very well at providing assistance for its students, yet changes must still be made for students who are dependent on parents that do not have sufficient credit or funds for affording their son/daughter to go to college. Financial aid should increase the loan amount that students can take out on their own. As for the rest of their goals, I think little by little they are meeting them. The best way to increase the number and diversity of students in training and education is by reaching out to them in high school. These high schools need counselors that encourage and work hard towards making all of their students succeed.

The Final Report compiled on June 21, 2007 by the Diversity Initiatives Committee stated that there are four broad thrusts they wish to improve and transform by 2012. These include:

I. Enhance Education and Workplace Environment Trust
II. Increase Representation Thrust
III. Enhance Scholarship Thrust
IV. Expand Community and Public Engagement Thrust

Unlike the Illinois Commitment, the goals outlined within these four thrusts are in their inception at the university, so I cannot comment if these goals are being met yet. I can only comment if I see them being implemented. So far, I see that the university has started a mandatory neo’s forum that is intended for all new members of the Greek community to attend and learn about diversity. I think this is a good step towards the right direction. Hopefully, the 3 hour required course on U.S. Minorities will also become a mandatory part of all new student’s curriculum within the near future. It’s good that the Diversity Initiatives Committee is broad and diverse itself; this way many voices will be heard and ideas will be shared. I believe and hope that this committee will make many changes for the better on this campus. As I said before, I believe it is a process that will not occur overnight, but hopefully, soon will start serving its purpose.

**Question:** Why do students join Greek organizations?

**Plan:**
- How does a Greek organization affect one’s academics?
- How does a Greek organization affect one’s social life?
- How does a Greek organization affect preparing for one’s future career?

**Data:**

Interviews

My first interview was with a female from a Caucasian sorority that is part of the Panhellenic Council. I approached her at the Undergraduate library on the second level where students can speak freely. I chose her because
I saw her wearing Greek letters on her sweater. She seemed unoccupied by her work at the time since she was chatting with her sorority sister. I excused myself and went along with the script I used to initiate the interview, which included an introduction of myself, my research topic, and then I asked if she was willing to participate. She gladly accepted to do the interview so I sat right next to her and began asking her the twenty-two questions concerning her experiences with the Greek System. She said she came in as a freshman knowing that Greeks were pretty popular on some campuses and that they contributed towards helping the community. Her first experience with Greek organizations was rushing, which she thought was overwhelming. She came to realize that there was more to it than just getting to know the girls and socializing. She felt that the negative aspect to Greek life was that it was time consuming but the positive aspects were making great friends and helping the community. Her cousin influenced her to join her sorority. She was attracted to her sorority because she thought the girls were genuine and spoke their mind. Everything was what she expected and more. She said that being Greek did not negatively affect her academics because they study together, they have study hours, and her sorority offers incentives to do well in school. She agreed that her sorority has positively affected her networking, volunteering, leadership skills, and social life, but her religious views have not been affected. When asked if being Greek has positively affected her view on multiculturalism, she said yes but not greatly; her sorority needed to work on that. By being Greek, she felt that it made her relationships stronger with her friends, family, and romantic partners. She felt that she did not limit herself only to her sisters because she had good relations with members from other houses and with non-Greeks. She believed that there was competition among Greeks for recruitment, but that it was not that bad. Issues she saw that affected Greek organizations as a whole were recruitment, completing volunteer hours, and getting involved with other organizations. Overall, she was satisfied with her sorority.

Next I met with one of my own fraternity sisters. Our Latino fraternity is part of the United Greek Council. She already had heard about my research project and was excited to answer my questions. I completed my interview with her while we were studying at the Undergraduate Library. She said that she had no prior knowledge of the Greek System before she came to college. During her freshman year, she had no intentions of joining a Greek organization and her first experience with Greeks was attending their parties. A negative aspect she noticed about the Greek System was that Greeks preached about education coming first, but their grades were not reflecting it. And a positive aspect she noticed was how Greeks were very involved in the community. Eventually, she met many members from the fraternity and felt that the organization was the right fit for her because it stood for everything she stood for. She liked their mission, their philanthropy, that it was Latino oriented, and it was Co-Ed; she thought it reflected what the real world was like, working with both men and women.
She came to realize that it was most definitely not all about the parties and making friends, there was also a great amount of work involved. She felt that everything about the fraternity was what she expected after becoming a member. She said that joining has neither negatively or positively affected her academics. It has made her more aware of things that she has to do before entering into the real world, such as learning group dynamics, being punctual, and making connections. She volunteers and helps out more now that she is a member; she enjoys it, especially when she gets to work with others in the fraternity. This is her first semester as a member, so she has not been given any leadership positions yet, but most likely by next semester she will have the opportunity to get more involved with leadership roles within the fraternity. Being a member has made her more social, she said she used to be very shy, but meeting and working with so many people has helped her overcome her shyness. She believes her religious views have stayed the same. Her relationships with her friends have not been affected; she continues to associate with friends who are not members of the fraternity. Her relationships with her family have been negatively affected because they want her to come home every weekend and it’s hard when it conflicts with fraternity events. Her relationships with romantic partners have not been affected. She said that she is very satisfied with the fraternity. Issues that she sees among other Greeks is competition for recruitment and stereotypes.

The next day at the Undergraduate library, I approached a table with two men and asked if either one of them were Greek (they were not wearing Greek letters). They said they both were in the same fraternity. Their Caucasian fraternity is part of the Interfraternity Council. I proceeded by introducing myself and asking the one who had answered me first if he was willing to complete an interview concerning his experience as a Greek member. He was very humorous and friendly and accepted to answer my questions. Before he came in as a freshman he knew that Greeks were big in Champaign and that they were very social. His first experience with Greek organizations was partying at one of the houses during his first night on campus; he said he had a good time. During his freshman year he learned that some organizations were really intense and that it all depended on the house. Choosing a house depended on what was the right fit for a person. He thought that some negative aspects about Greek life were hazing and binge drinking. A positive aspect about Greek life was meeting new people. He did not make a decision of joining his fraternity until he researched other houses. He chose his house because he liked the guys, he had good times with them, and they were laidback. Joining was everything he expected, he always had a good time with them, made solid friendships, and didn’t take things too seriously. He felt that joining a Greek organization has negatively affected his academics and has not improved his preparation for a future career, his leadership skills, his volunteerism, and his view on multiculturalism. But it has helped his networking and social life. His religious views have not changed.
Relationships with friends have been positively affected, relationships with family have not been affected, and relationships with romantic partners have been negatively affected. He said it was negative because being in the fraternity takes a big part of his time. He admitted that by being Greek he mostly associates only with his own fraternity brothers because he spends most of his time at the house. Two big issues he sees among all Greeks are stereotypes and lack of diversity. “Some stereotypes can prevent people from joining a house”, he said, “And some houses only attract certain people, for example some houses have white boys from the suburbs and that won’t change because they know each other and will continue to look for each other”. Overall, he is satisfied with his fraternity, he thinks he should calm down with the drinking because it could be affecting his health, but other than that, he is pretty satisfied.

As I looked around and asked nearly everyone at the library if they were Greek, I found it very difficult to find Greeks from the United Greek Council and Black Greek Council. So I proceeded to contact members through Facebook. The first person who replied was a member of a fraternity that belonged to the Black Greek Council. I met with him the next day at the Espresso Royale café inside the Undergraduate Library during a break he had between classes. I noticed him immediately walking down the stairs because he had a bright colored Greek jacket on. After he sat down and we spoke a little, I began to ask him about his first experiences with Greek organizations. He said that coming in as a freshman he already knew about the divine nine, Phi Beta Sigma because his father was a member of it, and that fraternities had girls. His first experience was attending a fraternity party; he said that he was treated like he was a “nobody” because he was non-Greek and they had an elitist attitude. That year he learned more about minority Greek organizations, their principles, founding dates, colors, and such. Negative aspects he saw his freshman year about Greeks were that they fought a lot and that they were known just for their parties. Positive aspects were community service, building connections, and learning how to manage one’s time. Initially he didn’t want to join a Greek organization but after he learned more about the fraternity’s principles and traditions, and meeting the men in the fraternity, he came to like it and wanted to be part of it. He said that after joining and becoming part of the fraternity, everything was what he had expected. He thinks that being Greek has negatively affected his grades because he spends a big portion of his time programming events for the fraternity and doing other things fraternity related. However, he feels that the fraternity has positively affected his preparation for a future career because he has made many connections with lawyers who are pointing him in the right direction. His volunteerism has increased tremendously, his leadership skills have improved (he is currently the president of his fraternity), his social life has improved because he has made many networks of friends, and his view on multiculturalism has improved as well because he interacts with other Greeks outside of the Black Greek Council. His religious views have not
changed. His relationships with friends and family have stayed the same, but his relationships with romantic partners have been negatively affected; he thinks this is due to girls being jealous because he is always around many people. He agrees somewhat that by being Greek he does limit himself to building friendships mostly with his own brothers. He thinks people sometimes isolate themselves from those who are not Greek because life can revolve around the fraternity, and for him, he can mostly relate with his own brothers. An issue he sees among Greeks is competition for recruits, “there are a lot of people to go after and each fraternity or sorority wants to be the biggest and the best”. “There is also a lot of fighting just like in the movies” he said. He thinks there is always pressure to do activities and be everywhere; sometimes he feels it can be cumbersome and life consuming, yet he enjoys being part of his fraternity. Since it was the most difficult finding females that were part of the Black Greek Council, I asked a friend if she could set up an interview for me with her coworker who was in a sorority that is part of the Black Greek Council. That evening I met her at her job in Dining Services at the Six Pack. She was very busy, especially because she was the supervisor that night. After waiting fifteen minutes for her at a table, she came over but did not sit down because other employees kept coming by her to ask questions. Finally, she settled down and she told me that before coming to college she knew that Greeks were known for helping the community. Her first experience with Greek organizations came from her God sister who was a member of the same sorority. Through her, she learned about Greek life. During her freshman year she learned that the women in the sorority were very involved with programming and they were active in the community. A negative aspect she saw was a lot of partying, especially among the Caucasian fraternities. A positive aspect she saw was community service, she thought that the African American Greeks were more involved with the community. She became interested in the sorority through her God sister; she did her research on the organization and met many girls. She said she grew to like them because “they were a primer sorority, they had good grades, were smart, and were well rounded”. After becoming a member she learned that Greeks had a great deal of work to do, people changed, and things were very different in the inside that were not known to others outside of the organization. After becoming a member, things were somewhat what she expected. She said she learned more after crossing (becoming a member), “people treated new members differently”. The experience allowed her to know who her true friends were and she saw the real personalities of the girls. Joining the sorority brought down her grades during the semester she pledged, but since then, her grades have been climbing. The sorority has given her an idea of what a national organization is like; she compared it to a business. She said that it has helped her network with members from other chapters and alumni. She volunteers more and her leadership skills have improved; currently she is the vice president of her sorority. The sorority has made her more social,
she meets other Greeks and travels to other chapters to meet sisters. Her view on multiculturalism has not changed significantly although she admits her sorority has tried to work with Latina sororities. Her sorority has allowed her to evaluate her Christian beliefs for the better; her sorority is a Christian sorority. The sorority has positively affected her friendships because it allowed her to find true friends. Her relationships with family have remained the same. Being Greek has made her believe that Greek girls attract non-Greek guys because Greek girls are popular. Being a member however, has not stopped her from building friendships with others outside of her sorority. She believes her sorority does not have too much competition with other black sororities for recruitment because her sorority has made a name for itself and they are known; “When you know you’re good, people seek you out”. Issues she sees are animosity among Greeks and competition for who’s first, who’s best, and who’s the biggest. She agrees this could be bad because people can lose focus on what they really stand for. Other than being time consuming, she loves her sorority and enjoys being part of it.

My next interview took place at the Union; I met with a member of an Asian fraternity that was part of the United Greek Council. This interview had to be the longest one out of the eight, it lasted almost an hour because he was talkative and inquisitive. I learned that he came to college his freshman year clueless about the Greek System. His first experience with Greeks was spending time with members of the fraternity before he pledged. He thought they had a very close brotherhood “They had each other’s backs.” That year he learned more about the houses, he attended parties, saw there were large amounts of liquor, many stereotypes he heard about were confirmed to him such as binge drinking, girls, and “crazy” things happening. He decided that he wanted to join his Greek organization because he wanted social support; people he could count on, especially because his father passed away and he felt alone. His friends convinced him to join, they were all of the same ethnicity and he felt he was able to relate to them more; they all shared similar majors and values. He also liked the networking, “alumni look out for those in school.” Not everything was what he had expected after becoming a member; he thought that many things that were told to him during pledging were not true. Leaders did not enforce what they stood for, some members had issues among each other, some guys he felt were not brotherhood material, but then there were some really good guys he felt were. After becoming a member, he learned a great deal about recruitment, organizing internal and external events, and found that it took hard work to develop the fraternity. A negative aspect he saw among Greeks in the United Greek Council was lack of diversity, “It seems that people stay in their own ethnic groups and that prevents others from joining who are outside of the ethnic group”. He believes there needs to be more diversity. Positive aspects he found after becoming a member were building close friendships (something he said he couldn’t get with everyday friends), earning respect
from other members, and getting so much back from the fraternity. He said that joining negatively affected his academics, especially when he pledged because it took most of his time. He didn’t like how the members at the time preached about time management yet they didn’t look out as much for his academics. However, the fraternity has helped him network. He has networked with alumni who are either in medical school or are engineers, “The alumni give good advice about getting into their careers.” The fraternity has helped him volunteer more and has helped him develop good leadership skills. He currently is in charge of a few tasks within the fraternity and in doing these tasks he has learned and improved from constructive criticism. He believes that the fraternity has improved his social life; he stated “people think we’re cool because we’re in this frat, people tend to be more social towards us”. He says that his views on multiculturalism have not really been affected because he associates mostly with members of his own ethnicity, “In fact, it’s the first time I’ve hungout with only Indians whereas before I came from diverse Chicago I hungout with other ethnicities regularly.” His religious views have not changed since joining the fraternity. His relationships with his friends have not really changed. He thinks that for some guys, joining can get to their heads because they think they’re “cool” and they have big heads about it. He has remained himself and has maintained good relations with others outside of his organization. He believes he is friendlier than others in the fraternity and thinks that some of them may exemplify the stereotypes. His relationships with his family have not been affected at all. He confessed that joining a fraternity has negatively affected his love life because fraternity guys are seen as being promiscuous. And he sees no competition for his fraternity because they are known and easily can recruit guys. An issue he sees among Greeks is that they only look out for their own organization. Within his fraternity, he thinks they do not get involved with the United Greek Council as much as they could be.

I met with the last female participant at the Espresso Royale café at the Undergraduate Library. She is a member of an Asian sorority that is part of the United Greek Council. She told me that she didn’t know much about Greeks before coming to college as a freshman, except that they were big on campus. Her first experience with Greeks was attending a fraternity party her first night on campus. During her freshman year, she heard many crazy stories about Greeks, but she also learned a great deal about different organizations; she saw they were very prideful, loyal, and that their organization was a big part of their lives. Initially, she was not interested in joining a Greek organization, but after attending an informational for the sorority, she became interested because it was service oriented and cultural. A negative aspect she saw among Greeks was hazing, she did not experience hazing because her sorority was and is against it. Positive aspects she saw among Greeks were the sisterhood and brotherhood, life long friendships, learning experiences, fun, community service, and learning group dynamics. After becoming a
member she learned about all the work there is involved in running a sorority and about the importance of keeping good relations among other Greeks. Everything for the most part was what she expected after becoming a member. Her sorority is fairly new but she believes they are doing a good job of putting their name out there. Since joining, she says that the sorority has helped her time manage, has taught her leadership skills, has helped her network with sisters around the country, has given her opportunities to give back to the community, and has given her the chance to meet many people and make close friendships. Before she came to college, she did not know there were organizations for other cultures, “In a way it can unite people, but it can also separate groups of people.” Her religious views have not been affected since joining the sorority. She said there has been no affect with her relationships with family and romantic partners since joining the sorority, except her relationships with friends have improved. She also has good relations with people outside her sorority. She believes there is competition for recruitment among the Panhellenic and Interfraternity Councils, but not so much in the United Greek Council because they’re cultural. Issues she sees among Greeks are making sure there are no internal conflicts, programming events, working together, and defying stereotypes. She said that joining her sorority has made college life more interesting, it is a big part of her college career, and she is happy.

My last interview was with a friend who is a member of a Latino fraternity that is part of the United Greek Council. I visited him at his home before he left for Thanksgiving break, he was in a bit of a rush, but he completed his interview. I sat in the living room with him while I ran through my questions. He said that before coming to college he had no idea what Greeks were all about. His first experience with Greek organizations was attending Quad day, he met many Greeks that day. During his freshman year he learned that Greeks were not just about partying but they were also about service. A negative aspect he saw was that Greeks partied too much, but a positive aspect he saw was that Greeks helped out in their communities. He did his research before deciding to join his fraternity. He loved the brotherhood and liked the fact that they were established all across the country. After he joined, he did not expect to find so many friendly brothers; he was struck by how hospitable they were. Ever since he became a member, his schedule became harder, but he said that he has worked on doing better academically. The fraternity has helped him develop professional skills, meet many people, and has given him the opportunity to travel all over; he always has a place to stay because of the brothers. He is more open to volunteer now and his leadership skills have improved, “Working in my frat’s ex(ecutive) board has prepared me for the real world.” He believes that joining the fraternity has allowed him to meet many from different ethnicities. His religious views have not changed since joining. His relationships with friends have been good in many ways, but he doesn’t like how people have stereotyped him based on the actions of individuals.
in his fraternity. His relationships with his family have been slightly negatively affected because he does not see them often. His love life has been negatively affected because it’s hard for him at times to manage a relationship and his social life, he can’t choose one over the other. He thinks there is a great deal of competition among Greeks for recruitment and it has caused him to limit his friendships to only his brothers for the most part. Issues he sees as a whole affecting Greeks are stereotypes about the pledging process and competition for recruitment.

Discuss: Introduction

During the first week of classes of my freshmen year, the sight of so many students wearing Greek letters struck me. Initially, I had no idea what Greeks were and even had thought that it meant students of Greek descent who were part of different cultural groups. I remember reading a pamphlet left inside my introductory folder from my residence hall that had pictures of all these young Caucasian students bunched up in groups smiling with Greek letters on their shirts. Amusingly, I remember thinking to myself “wow, I had no idea there were so many Greeks on this campus!” Apparently, all of this was new to me back then and I had no one in my family and among my friends back home who could have prepared me for this new experience.

I had heard the rumors and stories about hazing, rape, binge drinking, and ludicrous parties. But then I heard about building connections, activism within the community, continuing legacies that now were members of the organizations their relatives once were part of, and the social aspects of being a member of a Greek organization. Then there were the hand signs, the chants, and the rules for not disrespecting Greek letters. I was confused and hesitant to involve myself with the Greeks. All of my information about Greeks that year came from friends that were also freshmen and from a few upperclassmen who were trying to recruit me, all of them being Latinos/Latinas. Since I was only familiar with the Latino Greeks, I had no idea of the types of issues other Greeks were experiencing such as the African American, Asian, and Caucasian Greeks. I became wary of the whole Greek system and thought it was not for me. I thought, at one end I would not fit in with the African American, Asian, and Caucasian sororities and at the other end the Latino Greeks appeared to be too hard-core for me.

During the fall of 2006, I had moved in with my original roommate who I roomed with my freshmen year along with two other girls. Both my former roommate and one of my new roommates were members of the Alpha Psi Lambda Co-Ed Fraternity. I enjoyed their company and the company of the other members, most who I knew since I started at U of I. They all seemed very close like a family and they were always very involved with the community. It was an aspect that I needed to see to understand them as a fraternity better. Ultimately, I wanted to join and be part of their family. After
one semester of pledging, I had crossed over as a member of Alpha Psi Lambda and I was proud to be part of the organization. I came to realize what it was really like to be part of the Greek System and I finally understood.

I looked up Alpha Psi Lambda Fraternity and its respective council, the United Greek Council at the Student Life archives. From reading the mission statement of the United Greek Council, I learned that their purpose was to address and identify with the needs of the Latino Greeks. They were established during the spring of 2003 and by the following year, they had 11 Greek organizations that were part of the council. They felt that their former respective councils (Interfraternity Council and Panhellenic Council) were not addressing and or identifying with their needs. In their efforts, they wanted to unite the Latino member organizations that shared a common bond, mutual interest, and familiar concerns. And since then, other Greek organizations including Asian sororities and fraternities have joined and have worked together to cater to the needs of the Latino and Asian community by bringing in guest speakers, cultural events, community service, workshops, and many other services.

Alpha Psi Lambda Co-Ed Fraternity was the first Latino/a Fraternity established in the nation and the first established on this campus. Next year will mark the twentieth year anniversary for the Fraternity here at U of I. The purpose of Alpha Psi Lambda is to create a family among its members, to build connections with its alumni, to seek personal achievements, to serve the campus, and to build and retain relations with other Greeks. Not only has Alpha Psi Lambda been the longest lasting Latino Fraternity, it has also been the largest Latino Fraternity with the most members on this campus. And with its many members, the fraternity has set its mark on this campus for many years by being actively involved with peer retention, peer recruitment, special events, and inter-fraternity relations. I believe that Alpha Psi Lambda was the best fit for me because I relate with the members and with its purpose. These were my reasons for joining and I would like to continue my research on the Greek System by learning why others have decided to join their respective Greek organizations. I think that the Greek System here at the university really has an impact on student life both in the lives of Greeks and non-Greeks. Little research has been conducted on Greeks of different ethnicities and I believe it is important to see what are these differences and similarities among all Greeks to get a better perception of where there are gaps of understanding. When I say understanding, I mean understanding how these students perceive themselves, their organization, their school, and the rest of the student body. Hopefully this paper will contribute towards finding ways that the university can use to bridge these gaps so students can learn to understand each other better and discontinue isolating themselves from the rest of the student body.

Councils
This is a background of the four Greek councils at UIUC, this data comes from the Greek Affairs website http://www.odos.uiuc.edu/GREEK/links/greekCouncils.asp

Black Greek Council
The Black Greek Council is the umbrella organization for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s 12 predominantly African American fraternities and sororities. The council promotes interaction and the exchange of ideas among its member organizations through meetings and forums and cooperatively engages in service events, campus and community programs, and social activities.

Interfraternity Council
Over a century ago, fraternity men emerged on campus with the ideals of brotherhood and camaraderie so coveted by their founders. Like our esteemed forefather George Washington, they too saw the wisdom in our fraternal bonds and the endless benefits that those relationships would bring. An elaborate Greek history thus began. Today, 46 IFC fraternities and over 3,400 young men amass the largest Greek system in the country. The Interfraternity Council acts as a self-governing body that oversees the actions of these chapters and promotes the rewarding opportunities that each fraternity presents.

Panhellenic Council
The Panhellenic Council is the student-run government body of the Sorority community. In joining a sorority, a woman becomes a member, not only of her respective sorority, but also of the sorority community, a community which encompasses twenty-three sororities and 2900+ members.

As members of fraternities and sororities at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, we are committed to ensuring our success as students and invested partners in our organizations through celebrating friendship, leadership, scholarship, service, and social advancement while appreciating the diversity of our member organizations.

United Greek Council
As culturally based fraternities and sororities we came together in the spring of 2003 to create a fourth council at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign because several organizations did not feel that our respective councils were addressing and or identifying with our needs. All the organizations in United Greek Council (UGC) came together because of their common bond and mutual interest in Greek unity. Thus, the creation of this new council helped facilitate our goals of promoting cultural awareness, participating in philanthropy and community service events, giving back to the local community and other communities, and ultimately
the advancement of our own communities through the graduation of our members from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. We as individual organizations are not diverse or multicultural but together we embody and further our cause of cultural awareness and education.

Methods

Due to the short time span of this study, I decided to only interview eight students. One male and one female from four ethnic groups, so there were two African American, two Asian, two Caucasian, and two Latino students. All of my participants were undergraduates that were members of the Greek System. Four came from the United Greek Council, two from the Black Greek Council, one from the Panhellenic Council, and one from the Interfraternity Council. I learned from previous research projects that offering an incentive was beneficial because it would encourage participants to want to do the study. So I chose to purchase two-dollar gift cards from Espresso Royale café to give to participants that accepted to answer my questions. I thought two dollars was a decent amount to purchase a drink and most students would have access to Espresso Royale because it has locations all throughout campus. I chose to give my participants the card after the interview was completed.

At first, my initial method of obtaining participants was by approaching students at the Undergraduate Library during the evenings, a popular time for students to be at the library. Using this method, I easily set up two interviews on the spot with two participants that belonged to the Panhellenic and Interfraternity Councils. But after I completed my interviews with them, I found it very difficult to find members of the other two councils. A friend suggested that I go to Facebook, the popular social networking website to seek the rest of my participants. Sure enough after looking up the fraternities and sororities from the two councils and sending members messages I received replies by most of them within twenty-four hours.

The message that I sent to all of them included an introduction to who I was, what my purpose of contacting them was, the purpose of my research, I offered them the gift card for their participation, and lastly I asked them if they could respond with a yes or no and if yes when and where would work best for them to set up a meeting. During the interviews I had introduced myself again for those that were contacted via Facebook, explained to them the purpose of my research, told them that there were twenty-two questions, that the average time for the interview would last fifteen minutes, and at the end I would have them sign both consent forms and then I would give them their gift card. Most were enthusiastic to answer questions, they seemed to enjoy talking about their organizations, their own experiences, and were satisfied receiving an incentive. Within two weeks I had set up and completed all of my eight interviews.
Key questions:
1. What did you know about Greek organizations before you came to college?
2. What was your first experience with Greek organizations?
3. What did you learn about Greek organizations during your freshmen year?
4. What were some of the negative aspects?
5. What were some of the positive aspects?
6. What do you know now that you didn't know then about Greek organizations?
7. How did you decide that you wanted to join a Greek organization?
8. What attracted you to this organization?
9. Was it what you expected?
10. How has joining a Greek organization affected your academics?
11. How has joining a Greek organization affected your preparation for a future career?
12. How has joining a Greek organization affected your networking?
13. How has joining a Greek organization affected your volunteerism?
14. How has joining a Greek organization affected your leadership skills?
15. How has joining a Greek organization affected your social life?
16. How has joining a Greek organization affected your view on multiculturalism?
17. How has joining a Greek organization affected your religious views or practice?
18. How has joining a Greek organization affected your relationships with friends, family, and romantic partners?
19. Do you think by joining a Greek organization you limit yourself to building friendships with members from a different organization?
20. Do you think there is a lot of competition among Greek organizations for recruitment?
21. What are some issues as a whole that affect Greek organizations?
22. Are there any other aspects of your life that have been affected by joining a Greek organization?

Academic Sources and IDEALS links

Research shows that racial minorities are disproportionately more likely to come from homes that have few economic resources to invest in schooling and live in neighborhoods with failing schools. The result is that minorities are less likely than Caucasians to perform well in secondary school, and therefore, face greater obstacles achieving success in college. Severtis wanted to see what other factors can positively affect educational success in college other than socioeconomic resources. He found that establishing social networks or gaining social capital boosted the probability for African
Americans to graduate from college. Research reported that membership in Greek organizations increased the rate of graduation from six to nine percent above non-Greek members. Fraternities and Sororities are voluntary organizations that provide benefits to both the individual and the association. The individual gains resources through the association and the association is then strengthened by its members' accomplishments. These groups close their social networks to non-members and hence create a high level of obligation and trust among its members. Servertis states that by belonging to a Greek organization, it increases involvement in the college community, including both academic and extracurricular activities. There are few contemporary research studies that have addressed correlations between Greek membership and academic achievement along with college completion. But from those that do exist, there seems to be mixed results confirming a positive correlation between Greek membership and academic success. Servertis claims however, that there is an abundant amount of data confirming that membership in Greek organizations is positively related to overall satisfaction with the college experience and college graduation. Moreover, upon graduation, members of Greek organizations are able to use their social networks to gain excess to higher-paying jobs compared to non-members. Caucasians have greater resources at their disposal to guarantee their educational progress whereas minorities don’t have as many resources, so benefiting from a supportive social network in college can help minorities more so than Caucasians. In this study, the impact of membership affecting graduation rate for African Americans was about 55% larger than for Caucasians. Although this study only looked at African Americans, it coincides well with other minorities because they also benefit more from social networks in college. Servertis concluded that membership in a Greek organization is positively related to college graduation. And further more, membership was the most robust predictor whether the individual graduated from college. This finding supports the notion that having a social support network provides interpersonal resources that aids members in achievement.

Does going Greek impair undergraduate academic performance? A case study
By: Farley Grubb
Members of Greek organizations had an average of 1-2 percent lower cumulative GPA than non-Greeks did during their senior year in this study. This negative effect was most pronounced among small fraternities, but not as pronounced among sororities. Greek members however, were more likely to graduate on time because most had GPAs above the minimum 2.00 requirement and most had declared majors compared to non-Greeks. The magnitude of this GPA cost may be considered insignificant by many students compared to the social benefits, both immediate and long term,
that they expect from belonging to a Greek organization. However in this study, only the GPA of seniors were looked at. More studies like this should be conducted in the future that include the GPA of the other classes and also look to see if other students dropped out or transferred. This data does not reflect all colleges and universities as a whole; therefore it is best to look at all factors of the student population before comparing the GPA of students.

Greek life still segregated at University of Alabama
Source: Black Issues in Higher Education
The University of Alabama is a large public research institute that received national attention in 2001 when an African American student named Melody Twilley tried joining a Caucasian sorority but was not chosen despite having top credentials. A problem seen at the University of Alabama is the racially segregated fraternities and sororities. One student commented, “Even though we’re not back in the ‘60s and ‘70s, we’re not where we should be.” Robert Turner, 20, member of Kappa Alpha Psi, a Black fraternity at the University of Alabama. Another student commented “It’s basically that old feeling that you feel more comfortable in a place where you’re in the majority, why would you want to try? Why not just go where you’ll be accepted?” Krystle Simmons, member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, a Black sorority at the University of Alabama.

Sex and Drink-fuelled Fraternities Sober Up
By: Jon Marcus
Several universities have taken advantage of public antipathy towards fraternities and have thrown them off campus, stripped them of housing privileges, or have placed tight restrictions on them. Fraternity and sorority leaders do not want to be seen as elitist, restrictive, or as racist organizations that demonstrate excessive drinking and physical abuse. Alarmed fraternities have tried different initiatives to change their image. Sigma Phi Epsilon introduced the “Balanced Man Project”, which emphasized academic performance instead of partying and drinking. Phi Gamma Delta, rewarded members who maintained a high academic performance with cash scholarships and imposed a ban on alcohol in all its chapter houses. Alpha Tau Omega shut down dozens of its chapters because of alcohol or hazing incidents under their zero-tolerance policy.

Peer and social networks in job search
By: David Marmaros and Bruce Sacerdote
In this paper, the survey data explored demonstrated that students perceived networking with peers, alumni, faculty, and relatives to be an essential part of searching for jobs. Marmaros and Sacerdote found that students entering different careers used different modes of networking. The data also showed that men and women as well as Caucasian and non-Caucasian students used different networking strategies. There was a
strong connection between obtaining help from fraternity and sorority alumni and obtaining prestigious, high paying jobs.

The Greek System Stories: Fact and Fiction
By: ENGL27407-05
Fraternities and sororities make up the Greek System here at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. There are thousands of students from campuses across the country that participate in the Greek System, U of I has the largest Greek system. Therefore, there is no doubt that the Greek System plays a significant role in the lives of many students here. So when the researcher of this study interviewed students concerning Greek life, a variety of interesting stories were revealed. Many freshmen are already familiar with the Greek system through media exposure even before they arrive on campus. One interviewee believed that the MTV reality show called “Sorority Life” aired in 2003 based on actual events at fraternities and sororities played into the stereotypes that surrounded sorority girls.

For example, when members of a sorority decided which girls to call back to pledge their house, physical appearance was a big factor. Many of these shows focused on drinking and partying. Academics were rarely mentioned. In general, many women here at U of I felt that at the time MTV portrayed sorority girls as “stupid, vain and overly obsessed with appearance.” Although MTV showed disapproval towards these types of sororities, it appeared that this negative exposure did not deter women from wanting to join, instead it made them want to look into sororities more and actually participate in the Greek System.

For other students, some came to college with prior knowledge of the Greek System taught to them by their relatives who were Greek. They are considered legacies. It means that they have a relative that is an alumnus of a particular fraternity or sorority. For some legacy students, some said they felt pressured to join the Greek organization their relative joined. Each fall semester fraternities and sororities that are part of the Interfraternity and Panhellenic Greek Councils begin their recruitment process known as rush. This is the time that each house tries to attract new members and in order to appear unique; they focus on particular themes to showcase their houses. The sororities for example include themes like Tiffany & Co. and Sweet Home Alabama. The fraternities for example invite interests to watch sporting events and to eat.

After interests are chosen to pledge, members share stories with pledges concerning events that occurred at their house. From these stories, pledges can learn a lot about the house. Information about the house such as founding data is also shared and used to test pledges. When a pledge is formally inducted into the house, it is called initiation. On the day of initiation, secret stories and information about the house are passed down to the new members. It is this knowledge of their organization that makes them different from all other organizations. It is a secret and powerful bond
between members (alumni and collegiate). Since initiation and pledging are highly secretive, not surprisingly many stories are made and circulated about each house. Students interviewed in this study did not share secrets about their own house, but were eager to share gossip about other houses. Many stories were about the week before initiation day called “Hell Week.” These stories included humiliating the pledges in private as well as in public, making pledges do inconceivable things, and forcing pledges to harm themselves. These stories are not shared as much now because the university forbids hazing; therefore many students decide not to share stories that can harm the Greek System they are part of.

There are also stories about social standing, for example there are certain houses that can get free passes and drinks for any bar in town. There are negative slogans associated with different houses. There is animosity among houses. There is even animosity among Greeks and non-Greeks. The author states that despite stories, rumors, and negative portrayals of Greeks in the media, many students still continue to join fraternities and sororities at the university. And many alumni continue to support their houses. And whether they are fact or fiction, these stories are still fascinating.

Diversity and Discrimination Within the Greek System

By: ANTH 411_06-01

This article was very informative, the interviewer asked very detailed questions to U of I Greek female participants, did a great deal of research of the four different councils, their history, researched different sororities, and interviewed members from different sororities here on campus. At the end, the interviewer outlined many recommendations that are very relevant to my paper. These recommendations were to assist in evaluating the University, helping students to acknowledge and repair the present problems, provide suggestions on how to take actions towards implementing a Greek system that is representative of the University’s large and diverse population, which could hopefully one day promote and embrace multiculturalism. The only limitations were that the interviewer focused only on female participants and the sample size was small. However, the interviewer did capture an abundant amount of information from the small diverse sample size.

Discuss

Throughout my interviews with the eight participants, I noticed there were differences and similarities among the males, females, and different ethnic groups. I would like to begin with the differences I observed. I noticed that the African American and Caucasian students knew about Greeks before they came to college, whereas the Asian and Latino students did not. I am sure that there are Asian and Latino students who did come in as
freshman with an idea of what the Greek System was, but for the most part, Asians and Latinos were the least aware of Greeks before they come to college. This seems to correlate with the history of Greeks, the Asians and the Latinos are the two most recent ethnicities to start creating their own Greek organizations so it's not surprising that they are the least aware. Latinos are also the least represented (out of the four ethnicities) in schools of higher learning so many of them come to the university not knowing what to expect because majority of them are the first in their families to attend a university. Another difference seen came from the answers of the females and males who said they did have prior knowledge of Greek life before entering college. The males tended to say they knew about the social aspects whereas the females mentioned community service along with the social aspects. When it came to questioning the participants about their academics, I noticed that the males said being part of their organization has negatively affected their grades. The females said there was either no effect or their organization has helped them do well in school. This goes along with Farley Grubbs’ findings that males who were in Greek organizations tended to have lower grades than non-Greek males, however, the females did not show this same affect. Another difference observed between the males and females was their membership and how that affected their love lives. The males all said that being Greek has negatively affected their chances of having successful relationships because there are stereotypes that Greek men are promiscuous and also because time spent towards the fraternity takes away from their personal time. The females for the most part said there was no affect and one female in particular said that she believes both Greek and non-Greek men are attracted to Greek women because of their social status. When it comes to having good friendships with other Greeks or with non-Greeks, females said they were able to balance their friendships well, but most of the males said they tended to mostly associate only with their own fraternity brothers. Although the number of minority students on campus is small and they have more opportunities of interacting with each other, it seems that they too isolate themselves from other ethnicities because their organizations tend to attract the same ethnic groups. Once a person becomes a member, most of their time is spent with other members that belong to the same organization so even if it is not their intention to only associate with members of their own organization, it happens that way because most events sponsored by their organization are racially secluded. The Asian and Latinos mentioned that culture was a reason they were attracted to their organization. This has to be true of the African American and Caucasian students too, they just didn’t mention it. People tend to go where they feel familiar and accepted, so when it comes to choosing a sorority or fraternity, students tend to go to organizations that have other students they can relate to. I noticed many similarities that came across males, females, and the different ethnic groups. For most participants, their first encounter with Greeks was going
to the parties. Many mentioned that negative aspects to Greek life are hazing, drinking too much, partying too much, and stereotypes. Some mentioned they dislike being labeled based on the actions of a few individuals in their organization. Positive aspects that most agreed on were building close friendships that they could not get from everyday friends, helping the community, and being proactive in their organization. For some of them, they thought Greek life was not for them when they first came to college, but after meeting members from their respective organizations, they felt they found an organization that fit them, so it lead them to join. For most participants, they said their organization helped them network, learn group dynamics, build leadership skills, volunteer more, and improved their social lives. One participant mentioned it helped her get over her shyness. Lastly, all of the participants said joining their organization have made their college years more fulfilling and interesting. They are happy with their organization and with their college life.

Conclusion

From this research project, I learned that using the social networking database Facebook helped tremendously to find and contact participants for this study. Using gift cards from Espresso Royale were effective incentives that motivated participants to want to do the study. These interviews opened my eyes to the differences and similarities there exist among males, females, and different ethnic groups. There obviously are differences and it is wise to look at these differences if changes are to be made that will affect the whole student body. It is apparent that students choose organizations that make them feel welcomed and that fit their needs, so if there is to be diversification among Greeks, there must be ways that students can see these similarities they share in order to feel comfortable with each other. I strongly believe it is the responsibility of the university to catalyze these changes. The university must implement activities, functions, and policies that will encourage students from different ethnicities to interact with each other and stop isolating themselves from the rest of their peers. There were limitations to this research project. If time had permit, I would have liked to search for more in depth answers from participants, interviewed more participants, and researched more journals and articles relevant to this subject. I believe more studies like this will benefit the university and its students.

EUI Links: Diversity and Discrimination Within the Greek System- https://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1806

Greek System Stories: Fact or Fiction- https://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1332

Student Opinions on the University/The Orange Statement-
https://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1330

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Reflect:

Recommendations

I recommend that it be made mandatory that all four Greek councils work together and that they be monitored to check the progression of the students. I recommend that the university start making it a requirement that all students take a U.S minority’s course before completing their degree and through this course, it must also be mandatory for all students to attend a diversity workshop. I recommend that the university take it upon itself to frequently check if it is fulfilling its responsibilities and to carry them out. I recommend that the university reevaluate the new Neo’s forum they started holding this fall at the Union for all new Greek members. The university should make sure that the message about appreciating diversity be more effective at getting across to Caucasian students that attend the forum because the one I attended this fall did not make a difference at all in the minds of the Caucasian students who attended it. I recommend that the university take disciplinary actions that are fitting for the punishment of organizations and students that are racist and discriminatory and also make it mandatory for them to attend or hold workshops for cultural awareness. I recommend that representatives from the university meet regularly with representatives of the four councils to synchronize pledging processes, reach out to all student groups equally, and discuss relevant topics.

It seems that within the four Greek Councils, it is required that the Fraternities and Sororities work together doing volunteer work, workshops, and events. Although, it is good that Greeks within the same council work together, it would be better if Greeks could also work together within different councils. This would open up more opportunities to learn from each other, build connections, and do more for this campus and for each other.