Costs and Benefits of Greek Life on the UIUC Campus

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Abstract
Greek life on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus makes up an important portion of student life. Using an online survey and four focus groups, data were collected about the benefits and costs of membership within fraternities and sororities. The findings of the research concluded that members of fraternities and sororities believe their experiences in Greek life are beneficial during their college career and are worth the costs associated with Greek life. This can help to better explain what kind of benefits students receive from experiences in Greek life and why this large consumer decision is made every year by thousands of students.
Introduction

On the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus, there are 59 fraternities and 37 sororities within four different councils: Black Greek Council, Panhellenic Council, Interfraternity Council, and United Greek Council. This is a total of 7,796 students in Greek life making up 23.5% of the undergraduate population on the UIUC campus. With these significant statistics that shape student life and identity on the UIUC campus, we decided to research Greek life.

Our research was a cost-benefit analysis of Greek life on the UIUC campus. We asked what the costs and benefits of fraternity and sorority membership were. Furthermore, we wanted to know if the benefits exceeded the costs. We wanted to know whether students in Greek life appreciated or regretted their experiences in Greek life. The last part of our research question involved how costs and benefits of membership differ between fraternities and sororities.

Given the large number of students who are involved in Greek life on the UIUC campus, we wanted to research the costs and benefits in the framework of consumer decisions. Thousands of students make this consumer decision on our campus every year and it is important to know why students choose to make this consumer decision. Because it is such a large consumer decision, it is important to know if students are actually receiving benefits that exceed the costs. Our research gives us insight into what type of benefits students receive during their college years such as friendship, leadership opportunities, etc. Furthermore, our research gives us insight into what attracts students to Greek life and why students make the decision to join Greek life.

To find the answers to our research questions, we first conducted four focus groups. Two of the focus groups were made of fraternity members and two of the focus groups were made of sorority members. We then split our participants into groups by academic year so that we had
one sophomore fraternity focus group, one senior fraternity focus group, one sophomore sorority focus group, and one senior sorority focus group. This allowed us to collect a variety of answers across gender and age. After completing our focus groups, we released a survey to collect quantitative data about Greek life on campus. The survey allowed us to collect data about the amounts spent toward aspects of Greek life as well as collecting more benefits from a variety of different people across many houses. Our last method was an interview with Ashley Dye, who serves as the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs for the UIUC campus. This interview gave us more quantitative and qualitative data about how Greek life affects (both costs and benefits) the UIUC campus.

Our findings from our research are that Greek life has similar costs across all experiences such as apparel, meals, parking, dues, housing costs, etc. However, benefits can be varied. For example, some members may find spiritual value, building of skills, leadership opportunities, or friendship within their Greek life experience. There is a large disparity between the costs of joining a sorority and those of a fraternity. Sororities are more expensive and have more extra expenses that members are expected to pay. Despite this, our research shows that the Greek life experience is beneficial for those involved in fraternities and sororities. While there are many fiscal and non-fiscal costs associated with membership in a fraternity or sorority, most students believe their experience to be worthwhile.

**Literature Review**

There has been a vast amount of research over the last few years regarding the costs and benefits of Greek life membership. In fact, *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors* is an academic journal dedicated solely to the study of fraternities
and sororities. This academic journal has issued numerous studies over the past few years regarding the costs and benefits of fraternity/sorority membership. There have also, however, been many news articles regarding this topic. Many of these articles and studies have stemmed from the persistent negative publicity of fraternities and sororities across the country, and the need for increased transparency regarding the effects Greek life has on students.

A recent study conducted by Robert DeBard and Casey Sacks (2010) examined the impact of fraternity/sorority membership on the academic performance of more than 45,000 first-year students, from 17 different institutions. This study revealed a positive effect of membership on various measures of academic performance during the first year of college, and that membership was positively aligned with academic success when compared to those students who decide to remain unaffiliated. Specifically, the study found that sorority women had slightly higher fall, spring, and cumulative GPA’s than their non-affiliated peers during their first year of college. Fraternity men, likewise, had a higher cumulative first-year GPA than non-affiliated men (although it varied between fall and spring semesters). Additionally, fraternity men who joined in both the fall and spring semesters were retained at the university at higher rates than non-affiliated men. Sorority women who joined in the spring semester were retained at a significantly higher rate than non-affiliated women, although non-affiliated women were retained at a higher rate than women who joined in the fall semester. This study clearly emphasizes that higher GPA and retention rates are two major benefits that students receive from joining Greek life during their first year of college.

An article written for USA Today by Nicole Glass (2012) further examines some benefits students receive from Greek life. According to the article, 85% of Fortune 500 executives were part of Greek life during college. Additionally, since 1825, all but three U.S. presidents have
been members of a fraternity. These statistics provide evidence that the skills students improve through membership in Greek life, such as leadership and interpersonal skills, can significantly benefit their future careers. In fact, David Stollman, co-founder of CAMPUSSPEAK, claims that there is a large correlation between the skills students develop in Greek life and the ability to be successful in any endeavor. This is because Greek students learn how to interact with and lead their peers, and are forced to work together with people they might not get along with—skills that are vital to the post-college work force. This literature clearly highlights some of the future benefits that come from membership in Greek life during college.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is also published literature that highlights some of the costs (both fiscal and non-fiscal) of membership in Greek life. An article published for USA Today by Teddy Nykiel (2014) examines some of these costs. This article asserts that with new member fees, chapter dues, social expenses, and fines, Greek life can cost hundreds and even thousands of dollars a year on top of tuition, housing, and food. There are also extra costs that are specific to sorority women in particular, including rush outfits, Greek letter gear, and gifts for younger sisters. Jaclyn Schwartz, a junior at the University of Illinois who was interviewed for the article, says she spent around $150 just on presents for her pledge “daughter” who is also a member of Alpha Epsilon Phi sorority. Fines for unexcused absences or tardiness at events can also constitute large extra costs for fraternity or sorority members. These often-overlooked costs can add substantially to an already expensive investment.

Fiscal costs, however, are not the only costs associated with membership in Greek life. According to the New York Times article *Greek Letters at a Price* by Risa Doherty (2014), time is also a huge cost of Greek life membership. Gamma Phi Beta pledges must participate in an eight-week program with meetings at least three times a week, according to Krista Spanninger
Davis, international president of the sorority. Leah Jordan, a senior at Georgia State and former member of Alpha Omicron Pi, claims that although social events and dances are supposed to be “optional”, many sisters fear being treated with disapproval or left out of social circles if they aren’t present. Ms. Jordan had no choice but to drop her sorority after skipping classes and watching her grades slip while trying to attend sorority events and socials. Nicole Davies, a former peer advisor at American University, observes that many students’ grades suffer as they pledge, which directly contradicts the results of the aforementioned study by Robert DeBard and Casey Sacks. Non-fiscal costs such as time commitment, suffering grades, and skipping classes must not be overlooked.

Finally, a similar analysis of fraternities and sororities by Michael D’Arcangelo and Jessica Berner (2008) sought to conduct a cost-benefit study of the Rochester Institute of Technology fraternity/sorority program. This study put dollar values on various costs of fraternities and sororities including housing related costs, Fraternity/Sorority Affairs staff, and student conduct costs. Dollar values were also assigned to various benefits including retention impact, housing related benefits, and benefit to the community (community service and philanthropy). The study ultimately found that, in dollar value, the total benefits of fraternities and sororities exceeded the total costs. However, it is important to note that this study focused on the costs and benefits that fraternities and sororities impose on the university, whereas our study focuses on the costs and benefits that fraternities and sororities have on their individual members. This is a big distinction, and therefore may lead to different results.

**Background/Context**

To help make our research more meaningful, it is important to understand the size of the Greek system on campus and how many students it affects. The University of Illinois at Urbana-
Champaign has the largest Greek system in the United States with regards to the number of Greek chapters it has. Within the Black Greek, Interfraternity, Panhellenic, and United Greek governing councils, there are 96 chapters (59 fraternities and 37 sororities) on campus. There are 7,796 undergraduate students in Greek life, which represents approximately 23.5% of the undergraduate population. This is the second highest number of undergraduates in Greek life in the country, following the University of Alabama.

As part of our research, we interviewed a university official to gain a better understanding of Greek life benefits and costs from a non-student perspective. We interviewed Ashley Dye who is the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs and Assistant Dean of Students. She gave us a lot of interesting insights that we found useful for our cost-benefit analysis of Greek life on campus. Ashley talked a lot about the benefits of Greek life to students. She said that there were many tangible and intangible benefits including friendship, brotherhood/sisterhood, and personal and leadership development. Ashley made it clear that it is up to the students to reap these benefits. If a student is involved in their organization and takes on leadership positions, they gain many of the benefits that were mentioned above. If they do not take advantage of all the leadership opportunities, they miss out on these great experiences.

Another benefit Ashley mentioned that we did not really think about is the marketability of Greek students to employers. She said that fraternities and sororities are like mini laboratories for leadership experience. Fraternities and sororities are very social given the nature of the events they are involved with. Interacting with other people helps develop social skills, which are very sought after by employers. She said that employers put a lot of weight on a candidate's ability to be social and communicate effectively with other people. While top-notch academics are still essential, having these social skills increases the marketability of students to employers.
The fraternities and sororities we focused on in our research are the ones that are governed by the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and Panhellenic Council (PanHel). These councils have jurisdiction over their fraternities and sororities and provide rules and guidelines to help them be successful. The local UIUC IFC and PanHel organizations are under the umbrella of the national Interfraternity and Panhellenic councils that govern fraternities and sororities across the country. As said on the local IFC website, “As a whole, the purpose of the IFC is, in accordance with the objectives outline by the National Interfraternity Conference, to assist the fraternity system in the development of fraternity members through intellectual, social leadership, and humanitarian pursuits.” The overall goals of IFC and PanHel are to strengthen the fraternity and sorority systems on campus. Furthermore, these councils deal with disciplinary issues that involve chapters on campus. If there are any incidents of hazing or misconduct by a fraternity or sorority, their respective council will take the necessary disciplinary actions. Because of their missions in the Greek system on campus, the Interfraternity and Panhellenic Councils play a major role in how students evaluate the costs and benefits of being involved in Greek life.

Hypotheses

We had several different hypotheses for our research. We hypothesized that a larger percentage of younger members of Greek life would believe the benefits are worth the costs as compared to older members of Greek life. This is because we believed younger members of Greek life would be more enthusiastic about their experiences in general and less concerned about the costs. On the other hand, we hypothesized that seniors would feel more than any other group that the benefits they received from Greek life were not worth the costs. This is because seniors have been paying for the costs of membership in their fraternity/sorority for many years and probably aren’t nearly as involved now as they were when they were younger.
Another hypothesis we had was that senior boys would expect to receive more benefit from their fraternity after graduation than senior girls. We believed future opportunities would be a more prevalent benefit of fraternities than sororities. We also hypothesized that membership in a sorority is more costly than membership in a fraternity. We believed sororities would have higher average costs in most categories (dues, housing, etc.) than fraternity boys, leading to higher overall costs of membership.

Finally, we hypothesized that both fraternity and sorority members would believe the benefits they receive from Greek life are worth the costs. This was the most fundamental question we wanted to answer, and the purpose of our research project. Given the immense size of Greek life on the UIUC campus and the thousands of students who decide to go Greek each year, we believed the benefits of this decision must be worth the costs.

Methods: Focus Groups

Our group conducted four separate focus groups to gather qualitative data about the costs and benefits of fraternities and sororities. Because our group wanted to be able to compare and contrast responses between gender and age, we composed our focus groups according to these variables. Our four focus groups consisted of sophomore boys, sophomore girls, senior boys, and senior girls. All male participants in our focus groups were members of an IFC fraternity, and all female participants were members of a Panhellenic sorority. Composing our focus groups this way allowed us to compare results not only between fraternities and sororities, but also between upper and lower classmen. These four groups, we hypothesized, would provide us with very different results. We also made our best attempt to ensure that all participants in our female focus groups were members of a different sorority, and all participants in our male focus groups were members of a different fraternity. While most of the participants in our focus groups were
members of different fraternities/sororities, we were unable to avoid some overlap between members of the same fraternity/sorority due to difficulties with recruiting participants. We asked our participants not to tell us the specific fraternity or sorority to which they belonged. Taking these precautions would eliminate potential bias between the responses of members of the same fraternity/sorority.

We gathered participants for our focus groups using convenience and snowball sampling through personal connections. All members of our group reached out to people we know in Greek life who fit the criteria for each focus group. Each member of our group also moderated at least one focus group. The sophomore boys focus group consisted of four participants, and was moderated by Peter. The sophomore girls focus group consisted of five participants, and was moderated by David. The senior boys focus group consisted of four participants, and was moderated by Madison. And finally the senior girls focus group consisted of four participants, and was moderated by David. Each of these focus groups was conducted in a private area at the Business Instructional Facility (BIF), and pizza was provided for each group.

Each focus group was asked the same nine questions. These questions were designed to give us qualitative data regarding the costs and benefits of Greek life that could not be gathered through our online survey. All participants signed proper consent forms allowing the focus group to be recorded, and the responses were typed out in a full transcript. Our group then used these transcripts to summarize the main findings from every focus group. We were then able to compare and contrast the main findings from each focus group. This is the process our group used to analyze the focus group data, and the results of this analysis are reported in the Main Findings of the Focus Groups section.
**Methods: Online Surveys**

In addition to having in-person focus groups to gather data, we also sent out an online survey to students using the online survey software Qualtrics. We wanted to get as many survey responses as possible. Because there were multiple groups in our class doing research about Greek life, we worked together and sent out one single survey to undergraduate Greek students. This survey incorporated all of the most important questions each group wanted answered. After compiling all of the questions, we sent out the survey via email and social media.

Every person who contributed to the Greek survey compiled a list of email addresses for the survey to be sent to. After checking to make sure that no two people added the same email address, we sent out the survey to our list. In addition to sending out the survey through email, we also used Facebook. Our group made posts on Facebook asking people to take the quick survey.

One of the things we were worried about was that non-Greek or non-UIUC students would be taking the survey. To prevent this from happening, we added some screening questions to the beginning of the survey. The first screening question of the survey asks if they are currently an undergraduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The second question asks if they are currently a member of a fraternity or sorority. By adding these two screening questions, we were able to ensure that our data was coming from the students that we wanted to fill out the survey. Furthermore, there is the potential bias in the way that students were recruited to take the survey because we were sending it out to our friends as well as friends of friends.

We analyzed our online survey data using the statistics software Stata. Using this software allowed us to use codes to sort our data and answer each of our original hypotheses. We
were also able to create multiple graphs and tables with our data that allowed us to display our results more clearly.

**Findings: Main Online Survey**

We received a total of 237 responses to our online survey. The quantitative data that we gathered from this survey allowed us to prove or disprove all five of our original hypotheses. Although there were 237 responses to the entire survey, some respondents did not finish the survey and as a result some data was hard to collect. The number of respondents that we could use for our findings was 191 respondents. Out of this group, 102 of the respondents were male while 89 were female. Age also proved to be an important factor in our findings so we recorded the academic year of our respondents. From 191 respondents, 9.42% (18 respondents) were freshman, 24.08% (46 respondents) were sophomores, 39.27% (75 respondents) were juniors, and 27.23% (52 respondents) were seniors. Both academic year and gender were factors when analyzing our hypotheses.

One of our hypotheses was that a larger percentage of younger members of Greek life would believe the benefits are worth the costs as compared to older members of Greek life. In order to answer this hypothesis we referenced two different questions from our online survey: The participant’s year in school and whether or not the participant thought the benefits of Greek life are worth the costs. We then accumulated the responses of freshmen and sophomores to constitute “younger” members of Greek life, and the responses of juniors and seniors to constitute “older” members of Greek life. The results of this can be seen in Table 1, which shows that 93.75% of younger members of Greek believe the benefits they receive are worth the costs, compared to only 84.25% of older members. This result is consistent with our original hypothesis.
Another hypothesis we had was that senior boys would expect to receive more benefit from their fraternity after graduation than senior girls. One question in our online survey asked participants to rank the benefits they receive from belonging to a fraternity/sorority from first to last. The five benefits we listed were “social,” “networking/future opportunities,” “support/friendship,” “leadership opportunities,” and “values of your fraternity/sorority.” In our analysis we generated all the responses from participants who ranked “networking/future opportunities” as their first or second largest benefit, and then separated these responses by year in school so that only seniors were included. We finally separated these responses by gender. The results of this analysis are illustrated in Table 2, which shows that 41.38% of senior males ranked “networking/future opportunities” as their first or second largest benefit, compared to only 22.73% of senior females. This result shows that senior boys expect to receive more benefit from their fraternity after graduation than senior girls, which affirms our original hypothesis.

Our third hypothesis was that seniors would feel more than any other group that the benefits they received from Greek life were not worth the costs. Using our data to answer this hypothesis was fairly simple, as we only had to separate the responses to the online survey question “Do you believe the benefits you receive from belonging to a fraternity/sorority are greater than the costs that you pay?” by academic year. Our results show that 21.2% of seniors do not believe the benefits are worth the costs, compared to only 11.1% of freshmen, 4.3% of sophomores, and 12% of juniors. These results are illustrated in Table 3, and support our original hypothesis that seniors would feel more than any other group that the benefits they received from Greek life were not worth the costs.

Our fourth hypothesis was that membership in a sorority is more costly than membership in a fraternity. Question 10 of our online survey asked participants to indicate the amount they
spend per semester on seven different aspects of Greek life. After removing some outliers we averaged the amount spent on each of these different aspects of Greek life for fraternities and sororities. Doing this we found that, on average, sororities are more costly in meal plans, apparel, and gifts for pledge sons/daughters. Fraternities, on the other hand, are more costly in dues, total housing costs, social expenses, and philanthropy or charity. These average costs are displayed in Table 4. After adding the average costs for each of these aspects of Greek life we found that membership in a sorority when living in the house, on average, costs $6,074.55 a semester. The average cost for membership in a sorority when not living in the house but having a meal plan is $1,574.56. The average cost for membership in a fraternity when living in the house is $6,388.05 a semester, whereas the average cost when not living in the house but having a meal plan is $1,757.10 a semester. Because we found that, on average, fraternities are more costly than sororities, our original hypothesis was incorrect.

Our finding that fraternities are more costly on average than sororities, however, was quite contrary to popular opinion and past research. We believe a few factors may have prevented us from arriving at this same conclusion in our research. One factor that could have influenced our results is that we had a fairly small sample size that may not have been representative of our entire population. Furthermore our sample was not random, as we used personal connections to gather our data. This means some fraternity/sorority houses were probably not represented in our data. Finally, as mentioned before, many participants who took our survey did not respond to all the questions. This made it much harder for us to collect some data, and limited the responses we were able to use. These factors may have contributed to our surprising finding that fraternities seem to be more costly than sororities.
We also asked respondents about non-fiscal costs in the survey because we felt that it was important to gauge how students feel that non-fiscal costs play into their Greek life experiences. We gave three possible options on the survey to rank from 1 to 3 with 1 being the largest non-fiscal cost. These non-fiscal costs are negative stereotypes associated with Greek life, time, and social obligations. The most commonly ranked non-fiscal cost was time. 58.5% of our respondents noted that time was their biggest non-fiscal cost. The second largest non-fiscal cost was negative stereotypes associated with Greek life with 32.7% of our respondents noting this as their first non-fiscal cost. Finally, only 8.7% ranked social obligations as their largest non-fiscal cost.

Our assumptions about both fiscal and non-fiscal costs encouraged us to ask questions on our survey about why people sometimes drop their fraternity or sorority. We wanted to find out if respondents who have thought about dropping their fraternity or sorority cited cost as a reason for dropping. Out of the 210 respondents who responded to this question, 80 respondents noted that they had thought about dropping their house. This is a significant percentage of 38.10% of respondents for this question. If students answered “yes” to this question, they were re-directed to a follow-up question that asked them to pick a reason why they thought about dropping their house. The four available reasons were time, cost, reduced need for formally organized social events, and academics. By far, the biggest reason chosen by respondents was cost. 45.57% of respondents chose cost as the biggest reason for thinking about dropping their house. The second biggest reason was reduced need for formally organized social events at 22.78% while time was chosen by 21.52% of respondents and academics was chosen by 10.13% of respondents.

Our final hypothesis, and the most fundamental question we wanted to answer with our research, was that both fraternity and sorority members would believe the benefits they receive
from Greek life are worth the costs. To answer this hypothesis we simply referred to survey question 14, which asked whether the participants believed the benefits of membership in Greek life are worth the costs they pay. We found that 179 participants, or 85.24%, thought the benefits were worth the costs. 31 participants, or 14.76%, did not believe the benefits were worth the costs. This means the vast majority of our respondents believe the benefits of membership in Greek life are worth the costs, which affirms our original hypothesis.

**Findings: Focus Group**

Each of our four focus groups were made of similar people. All of the focus groups were members of Greek life on the UIUC campus that were in houses governed by Interfraternity Council and Panhellenic Council. However, we did ask our participants not to name the specific fraternity or sorority to which they belonged in case this created a bias amongst the group. We had a focus group made of sophomore fraternity males, sophomore sorority females, senior fraternity males, and senior sorority females. The variation between groups allowed us to gauge differences between fraternities and sororities as well as those who have recently joined Greek life and those who are about to leave behind their Greek life experience.

We first asked each of our focus groups why they joined their fraternity or sorority. Answers did not seem to vary much by age or gender. Our participants joined Greek life because friends decided to join, because family used to be involved with Greek life, or because they wanted to find a family atmosphere. A common response was that joining Greek life helped to find a smaller place to belong on a large campus. This question helped us gauge what students are looking for when they first make the consumer decision of joining a fraternity or sorority.

We then asked our participants about the benefits they receive from membership in a fraternity or sorority. Answers varied greatly among participants. For both sophomore focus
groups, Greek life had given them a way to gain leadership opportunities. The social aspect was also important to the sophomore males. Both the sophomore males and sophomore females touched on mentorship and the significance of making connections with older members of their house. Sophomore girls also believed that involvement with philanthropies and the support and knowledge gained from other members was beneficial. Senior males in fraternities were more reflective in their answers. They touched on the skills they had gained from being involved in Greek life such as organization, time management, conversation skills, and being able to get along with people. Interaction with people was deemed to be an important part of being in social fraternity because it could help with future career opportunities. Senior females also noted that joining Greek life could help them find employment. Alumni connections were also important to these graduating seniors. Senior females also mentioned friends, support, and entertainment as benefits to being in a sorority.

Along with asking about benefits that members of Greek life receive, we asked each focus group about unintended benefits that they did not seem originally apparent when they first joined Greek life. Sophomore males believed that the connections their brothers had with other organizations around campus were helpful as well as alumni connections. Sophomore girls explained the growth they have each felt as an individual since joining their sorority. They explained that joining Greek life has helped them become more decisive and confident, and how surrounding themselves with similar people has resulted in growth. Senior males focused on leadership positions and the support of joining a house. One senior male mentioned that the spirituality and values of their house was a benefit that they did not foresee while rushing. Senior females could think of less intended benefits as they only touched on how Greek life gives people a way to meet and get to know many people. Asking our participants about both intended
and unintended benefits allowed us to learn about a variety of benefits that students can receive by joining Greek life. It also allowed our participants to reflect on their experiences and think about what truly benefits them in Greek life before asking about the costs.

We next asked about the costs of joining Greek life on campus. Both sophomore males and females noted that meal plans were costly and were not worth it. Beyond the cost of meal plans, participants in the sophomore focus groups mentioned dues and fees of living in the house. Sophomore females had some unique costs such as apparel and gifts for their pledge daughters. These sophomore females stressed that they are expected to buy many gifts for their pledge daughters. This denotes another difference in cost between age and gender because it is during sophomore year that females in sororities receive a pledge daughter. This is not a cost that was noted in the sophomore boys focus group.

Senior males seemed to be less concerned with fiscal costs. Although social fees and dues were mentioned, the conversation was more focused on non-fiscal costs such as time, liability, and even the perception of joining Greek life. The non-fiscal costs seemed to be more significant than fiscal costs even after four years of being involved with Greek life. When asked about non-fiscal costs, all four focus groups mentioned time as their biggest cost. Greek life seemed to take up much of their time and this was not always positive. When asked about the biggest expense of membership, both focus groups made of seniors mentioned dues as the biggest costs. The sophomore focus groups mentioned that living in the house was the biggest expense for them. Sophomores are more concerned about the costs of living in the house because sophomore year is when most members of Greek life decide to live in the house. This denotes a different cost between ages in Greek life. However, both sophomore females and males believed that the costs
they pay for living in the house were comparable to the costs paid for apartments and living expenses for those not involved in Greek life.

We also asked our focus group participants about why they believe people drop their fraternities or sororities. We wanted to gauge if the costs of Greek life were not worth the benefits for some people thus causing them to drop their houses. Some participants believed that the social benefit of fraternities and sororities ends after a few years. Students are no longer reliant on their houses for social benefit or friendship. They may establish friend groups outside of Greek life. Seniors noted that their sororities or fraternities take up time that could be spent looking for future opportunities. Sophomore females also noted that they knew that seniors often drop because of time. All focus groups noted that cost is a huge factor for many people who drop their house. One sophomore male participant said: “I’d say after a while people realize that the time and the money being spent isn’t worth what they thought it originally was.”

Finally, the last question we asked each of our focus groups was whether the expenses of membership in their fraternity or sorority were worth the benefits received. The answer was overwhelming yes by every person who participated in all focus groups. Both sophomore males and sophomore females felt that the money they pay for their experiences in Greek life is comparable to those outside of Greek life who are paying for an apartment, groceries, and other expenses. Senior males were the most reflective about their experiences in Greek life. They agreed that their experiences were worth the expenses. It was also concluded that Greek life is an investment for friends and future opportunities. The senior males felt their experiences in Greek life gave them a community and a home while in college.

While we received positive and helpful feedback from our focus groups, we do believe that there may have been a herd mentality at play in each group. The herd mentality could have
caused participants of each focus group to feel influenced by their peers in Greek life into only mentioning positive aspects of Greek life. Beyond fiscal costs, it was difficult for any group member to think of any negative aspects of Greek life. Additionally, every person that participated believed that their Greek life experience and the benefits they receive were worth the costs. While this may be true, it could also be difficult for someone who feels differently to speak out in a group of people who are like-minded. This herd mentality is a potential limitation for the research and data we collected within the focus groups.

Policy Implications

There are a number of policy implications involving our research question. One of the things we learned from our focus groups is that many upperclassmen end up dropping their fraternity/sorority because they feel like they have already reaped all the benefits of their membership by their senior year. This was further supported by the results of our online survey. One of our questions was “Have you ever thought about dropping your fraternity/sorority membership?” We were surprised that 38.10% of respondents answered yes to this question. Our next question in the survey asked what would have been the main reason for dropping, and cost was the top reason. With regards to the policies of individual Greek chapters, one recommendation we have based on our data is that seniors should not have to pay the same amount in membership dues as the younger members. In order to retain the membership of seniors in their Greek houses and provide an incentive to stay active, their dues should be lowered through internal policy changes.

Another recommendation we have based on our research is regarding the image that the Greek system has. One of the challenges that the Greek system faces is negative news coverage stemming from incidents that happen almost every year. It is unfortunate that there are a few
irresponsible individuals every year who do something that causes a lot of bad press about their fraternity/sorority and ultimately the Greek system as a whole. This causes a lot of negative stereotypes to be projected upon Greek affiliated students. The perception of other people on you because you are in a Greek house is one of the non-fiscal costs that was talked about in our senior boy focus group. It was surprising to us when our focus group participants started talking about this because we did not think about the image of the Greek system as a cost of membership. Furthermore, this was supported by our online survey responses. One of our questions asked participants to rank the non-fiscal costs associated with Greek life. To our surprise, 32.7% of respondents ranked “negative stereotypes associated with Greek life” as the number one cost. With this being said, some of the things that the local UIUC Interfraternity and Panhellenic councils as well as their national organizations need to do with their policies is combat the negative press about the Greek system. They should promote the Greek system as having more than just social benefits. They need to highlight the leadership, networking, and future opportunities that also come with Greek life involvement. From our data, these are some of the main benefits that students receive from their Greek life involvement, and therefore should be highlighted publicly to counter some of the negative publicity about Greek life and shed more light on the prevalent benefits.

Conclusion

Conducting this research project has left us with significant findings regarding the costs and benefits of Greek life on the UIUC campus. The most important finding our group arrived at is that students who are members of Greek life at UIUC overwhelmingly believe the benefits they receive from their membership are worth the costs. This was true for all of the participants in our focus groups and a vast majority of those who took the online survey. This influential
finding helps explain why Greek life is immensely popular at UIUC and why thousands of students make the decision to go Greek each year.

While the vast majority of students believe the benefits of Greek life membership are worth the costs, we did find that seniors were by far the most likely to believe the benefits are not worth the costs. This important finding helps explain why many members of Greek life end up dropping their fraternity/sorority during their senior year. We also found that the costs and benefits of Greek life membership vary greatly between both gender and age. Both of our sophomore focus groups mentioned leadership opportunities, mentorship, and connecting with older members of the house as large benefits. Both senior groups emphasized much more the future benefits of Greek life including a larger network and alumni connections. Sophomores seemed to be concerned about the fiscal costs of Greek life including meal plans and living in the house. Senior males, on the other hand, talked more about the non-fiscal costs of Greek life including time, liability, and the perception of Greek life. These results insist that even though most members of Greek life believe the benefits are worth the costs, they believe it for different reasons.

It is also important to address some of the limitations of our study. Regarding our online survey, our sample size was very small relative to the entire Greek population at UIUC. Because of this small sample size we cannot definitively conclude that our sample is representative of the entire population of Greek life students at UIUC. Moreover, many respondents to our online survey failed to complete the survey or skipped certain questions. As a result, some of the data was harder to collect and we could only use the responses of participants who had answered that specific question. This narrowed our sample size even more on some questions.
Regarding our focus groups, we believe there was some herd mentality that was present in each group. This means participants were most likely influenced by their peers in the focus group, especially when it came to discussion about costs. This could also help explain why all focus group participants unanimously believed the benefits of Greek life were worth the costs, whereas almost 15% of our online survey participants did not.

The conclusion of our research project also leaves us with some suggestions for future research. One suggestion for future research regards how students fund their Greek life experience. The way in which students pay for their membership in Greek life (jobs, parents, loans, etc.), we believe, might have a real impact on whether they believe the benefits they receive are worth the costs. Another suggestion for future research would be to compare the costs and benefits of Greek life at different universities. Our research was specific to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, but conducting a cost-benefit analysis of Greek life at another university might provide much different results. Comparing the costs and benefits of Greek life across different institutions would provide additional insight into common costs and benefits and those that might be particular to your university.
References


APPENDIX A: DATA RESULTS FROM ONLINE SURVEY

Table 1 - Comparison between younger and older members about benefits and costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Worth the Costs</th>
<th>Not Worth the Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman and Sophomores</td>
<td>93.75%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniors and Seniors</td>
<td>84.25%</td>
<td>15.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Seniors and Future Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senior Males</th>
<th>Senior Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked 1 or 2</td>
<td>41.38%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 - Comparison between academic year about whether benefits were worth the costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Worth the Costs</th>
<th>Not Worth the Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniors</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 - Average costs for fraternities and sororities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average for fraternities</th>
<th>Average for sororities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dues</strong></td>
<td>$976.11 (90)</td>
<td>$823.15 (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total housing cost including meal plan</strong></td>
<td>$4996.579 (57)</td>
<td>$4913.66 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal plans (if not living in the house, but have a meal plan)</td>
<td>$365.625 (32)</td>
<td>$413.67 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Apparel</strong></td>
<td>$112.69 (93)</td>
<td>$124.1447 (76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gifts for pledge sons/daughters</strong></td>
<td>$30.59 (93)</td>
<td>$105.84 (77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social expenses</strong></td>
<td>$226.69 (89)</td>
<td>$70.42254 (71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philanthropy or charity</strong></td>
<td>$45.39 (92)</td>
<td>$37.33 (75)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers in parentheses indicate frequencies

Table 5 - Benefits are worth/not worth the costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thought the benefits were worth the costs</th>
<th>Thought the benefits were not worth the costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td>179</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>85.24%</td>
<td>14.76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>