

ASSESSING THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS OF COLOR IN SOCIAL GREEK ORGANIZATIONS AT UCONN

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Purpose of the Research

- Experiences specific to students of color in social Greek organizations are largely unknown
- Students' experiences have not been assessed from a racial/cultural perspective
- Offices that train, support, and advise these students want to ensure they are doing so effectively

Methodology

This assessment was a convergent parallel mixed methods study, utilizing quantitative data from survey results, and qualitative data from opened-ended survey questions, and both focus groups and interviews

Participants:

- 428 undergraduate students of color involved in Greek life at UConn were invited to participate in a survey via email
- 110 students responded to the survey which represents a confidence interval of 95 +/-8% and a response rate of 26%
- Researchers conducted 2 focus groups with 5 students total and 7 individual interviews

Data Collection:

- The researchers created all instruments utilized in this assessment
- Quantitative data was collected through survey responses
- Qualitative data was gathered through focus groups, interviews and individual survey responses to open-ended questions

Data Analysis:

- Quantitative data was cross-referenced through Campus Labs for descriptive statistics
- Qualitative data was analyzed with the constant comparative method with two investigators coding each piece of datum and meeting to reconcile differences
- Investigators recognized patterns among data then determined and delimited original categories to organize themes

Review of the Literature

Involvement Theory:

"Students learn more and more deeply when their experiences inside and outside the classroom are complementary and mutually reinforcing" (Kuh, 2001, p. 264).

Co-curricular involvement can have positive impacts for college students including: retention, sense of belonging, academic success, cognitive development, openness to diversity, preparation for life after college, and self-confidence. (Astin, 1984; Pascarella, 1996; Moore, Lovell, McGann & Wyrick, 1998; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini & Nora, 2001)

History of Fraternities & Sororities:

- *Origins in secret societies*
- *Established to allow students to socialize outside of colleges' structured daily activities*

Historical Exclusion of Students of Color in Greek Organizations:

- *1924 survey indicated 28 fraternities required a racial test for potential members*
- *Expanding access to higher education and exclusive nature of fraternities led to rise of alternative Greek organizations*
- *Most NIC organizations removed race and religion restrictions by 1957*

Greek Life at UConn:

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC)

At UConn: known as UCPC, 9 sororities, predominately White

National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)

At UConn: known as NPHC, 4 organizations, culturally-based

North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC)

At UConn: known as IFC, 11 fraternities, predominately White

Intercultural Greek Council (IGC)

At UConn: known as IGC, 10 organizations, culturally-based

Factors that Commonly Affect Students of Color:

- Race/culture specific factors
 - Racial/cultural identity development
 - Stereotype threat
 - Issues that traditionally affect of all students
- (Jackson, 2001; Kim, 2001; Ferdman and Gallagos, 2001)

Limitations

- We did not reach our confidence interval
- Language used in survey was potentially leading during additional open-ended questions
- New instrument was created by researchers and was not piloted prior to use

Results and Findings

Overall 87% of students of color were satisfied with their experience in Greek Life

- There was a variation between students in predominately White organizations (96%) and students in culturally-based organizations (75%)
- Participants' own organization had the greatest affect on all five benefits
 - sense of belonging
 - enhanced interpersonal skills
 - enhanced leadership skills
 - enhanced academic success
 - racial and cultural background respectedregardless of gender or organization type
- Gender breakdown did not affect any of the five benefits
- Participants in predominately White organizations reported benefiting from Greek Life overall more than students in culturally-based organizations
- Participants in culturally-based organizations reported benefiting from the Cultural Centers more than students in predominately White organizations
- Participants in predominately White organizations had a higher sense of satisfaction with Greek Life than those in culturally-based organizations

Conclusions

- One's specific organization (local UConn chapter) is paramount to general Greek life or Cultural Centers
- Students of color in culturally-based organizations have a lower sense of belonging within the Greek community at UConn than students in predominately White organizations
- Students of color in culturally-based organizations feel misunderstood and stigmatized by the general Greek community
- Students of color in predominately White organizations feel their racial and ethnic identity is supported in their organization and the Greek community as a whole
- Students of color in predominately White organizations are less involved with the Cultural Centers than students of color in culturally-based organizations
- Regardless of organization type, students of color are satisfied with their Greek experience

Implications

For future practice:

- Assess OFSL requirements for Greek organizations, and attempt to cater them to organization type and size
- Increase support from professional OFSL staff members for culturally-based organizations
- Develop a more comprehensive demographic breakdown of students in Greek life at UConn
- Further explore and archive the history of Greek life at UConn to aid with future research

For future research and assessment:

- Determine not only why students join specific organizations, but also why they stay
- Determine how a student's background/upbringing pre-college affects identity development, organization choice, and overall Greek life experience
- Explore the definition of "student of color" in relation to how students self-identify