

March 2008

Using Cost-Benefit Analysis for Fraternity and Sorority Affairs Assessment: Creating a Business Case for Student Success in Fraternal Organizations

Michael D'Arcangelo
Rochester Institute of Technology, mndccl@rit.edu

Jessica R. Berner
Rochester University of Technology, jrbcccl@rit.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/oracle>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

D'Arcangelo, Michael and Berner, Jessica R. (2008) "Using Cost-Benefit Analysis for Fraternity and Sorority Affairs Assessment: Creating a Business Case for Student Success in Fraternal Organizations," *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25774/mnn2-3p05>
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/oracle/vol3/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors by an authorized editor of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

USING COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR FRATERNITY AND SORORITY AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT: CREATING A BUSINESS CASE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS IN FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Michael D'Arcangelo and Jessica R. Berner

Cost-benefit analysis can be an effective method for programmatic assessment, evaluation, and validation in fraternity/sorority affairs. This article provides an overview of a model cost-effectiveness assessment strategy outlined by Kennedy, Moran, and Upcraft (2001) and a cost-benefit study of the Rochester Institute of Technology fraternity/sorority program. Special attention is given to providing credible methods for fraternity/sorority professionals to measure programs using data related to organizational efficacy and student retention and applying that data to guide public perception. Recommendations for application on other campuses are provided in an effort to improve assessment practices and aid institutions in assessing the value of fraternal organizations.

Assessment is well established in higher education and student affairs. However, few fraternity/sorority affairs programs use assessment to its fullest potential (Perlow, 2007). Fraternal organizations are often considered a vulnerable target of critics. Much of the research regarding their value is anecdotal. Many fraternity/sorority professionals collect and provide data about their communities, such as grade point averages achieved, community service hours logged, or philanthropic dollars raised. Even so, they may not be able to bolster the credibility of fraternity and sorority life to faculty, staff, and trustees who are considered valuable stakeholders in the university community. A cost-benefit analysis can provide additional answers to the many questions posed by these stakeholders.

Assessing cost effectiveness “may be the most neglected form of assessment in student affairs” (p.175), according to Kennedy, Moran, and Upcraft (2001), who deemed three questions to be critical when conducting a cost-benefit analysis. The first question to consider is how the service or program contributes to the institutional mission. No program or service exists in isolation from the greater mission of the institution. An assessment allows program managers to explore and document links between departmental services and programs and the institutional mission. Secondly, the professional should investigate institutional budget policies. It is vital to understand that just as institutional environments and student populations have unique characteristics and methodologies, philosophies of accounting, finance, and cost analysis are also influenced by institutional culture (Dill, 2000; Levin & McEwan, 2001). Many student affairs professionals have backgrounds in human services or counseling and, thus, tend to avoid cost-benefit analysis due to its quantitative emphasis and focus on the financial disciplines. However, assistance in understanding and applying many of these measurements may be obtained through experts and allies within the institution who can demystify the cost structuring processes unique to its systems. Finally, it is important to consider the future direction of the institution.

When a cost-benefit analysis is completed, the data must be useable (Levin & McEwan, 2001). Data should help evaluate strengths and weaknesses and point to new directions for program development. If formulated within the cultural and financial framework of the institution, constituents will examine the results and consider outcomes. Each of the three questions reflects a different aspect of the assessment's purpose and were utilized as a framework for analyzing the cost-benefit analysis practices used at Rochester Institute of Technology.

Background

Institutional Budget Process: What is a Cost-Benefit Analysis?

A cost-benefit analysis assigns value to a program from a financial perspective. It uses a standard value (the dollar) as the unit for measurement, theoretically removing subjectivity from the analysis. In its simplest form, a cost-benefit analysis is a comprehensive accounting of all the costs of a program compared to the benefits, summarized as a ratio. Costs reflect dollars invested into the program; benefits are the revenues or financial gains generated by the program that then promote the institution. The ratio of costs to benefits is often referred to as a return on investment or ROI (Fitz-enz, 2000). If the benefits are greater than the costs invested into the program, it is considered to have a favorable (positive) ROI and generally favorable value. If the costs are greater than the benefits, then the program has an unfavorable (negative) ROI and may be considered to be of questionable worth.

Operating Assumptions and Strategies

Before beginning a cost-benefit analysis, it is important to establish key operating assumptions and strategies that facilitate effective completion. The analyst must first specify the exact dates of the analysis to most effectively assess program performance. It is the authors' recommendation that the study be conducted for one budget operating year to coincide with the fiscal year of the institution. However, a caveat is that some fraternity/sorority programs operate on nine or ten month fiscal cycles. In this case, the analysis plan can only consider costs (and even benefits) realized during the months of operation.

The cost-benefit analysis should be completed for the most recent year for which the fraternity/sorority professional has access to a complete set of financial data. This will require some research and outreach to various departments to ensure the availability of data. The type of data required will depend on the university and fraternity/sorority program. Typical data that could be collected includes salaries, benefits, housing costs (when appropriate), administrative costs, and programming expenditures (see Table 2).

Establishing Your Assessment Content

The fraternity/sorority professional should consider campus context prior to enacting any plan. To do so, the authors recommend that the fraternity/sorority professional work closely with his/her immediate supervisor. It may also be helpful to obtain an endorsement from a key administrator near the top of the organizational structure (possibly the senior financial officer). Finding these allies will be pivotal to endorsing the analysis, soliciting the aid of others, and if necessary, rallying people to assist with your data collection. To help gain allies, frequently reiterate the use of the Kennedy et al. (2001) model as a foundation for inquiry. Considering the

essential questions posed by the model can also help make the case for conducting the assessment.

When completing a cost-benefit analysis, the assessment team must determine the format, language, and definitions that best suit the program's system of budgeting, cost analysis, and culture. Kennedy et al. (2001) propose a series of income and expense ledgers similar to a budget structure. Expenses are represented as costs. Revenue, or dollars gained, is represented as benefits. This method is especially helpful for professionals who are completing their first analysis. During this process, definitions and language are important. Fraternity/sorority professionals will find it helpful to discuss the language that is used most on their campus and in their division of financial administration. Often-used financial language and generic definitions are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Definitions of Terms Used in Financial Administration and Accounting

<i>Headcount</i>	Headcount refers to the actual staff person who occupies a position, measured by salary and benefits.
<i>Benefits</i>	Benefits are often an institutional formula or package defined by a person's full or part-time status.
<i>Formulas</i>	Formulas are mathematical equations that factor various costs and revenues together to represent the financial value for an on-campus service.
<i>Chargebacks</i>	Chargebacks represent the costs that are charged back to the recipient of the service, often representing a formula.
<i>Auxiliary Services</i>	Auxiliary Services are departments that serve as profit centers for the university. These profit centers are viewed as efficiency mechanisms that ultimately reduce overhead for the university by producing services internally, thus reducing overall costs for the university.

Defining the Fraternity/Sorority Program's Relation to the Institution's Mission

The vision, mission, and values of the institution should be integrated into the division, department, and program efforts. This is critical for social and cultural congruence from a management perspective (Dill, 2000). Consequently, fraternity/sorority professionals should be similarly certain that the vision, mission, and goals of their respective programs are aligned with those of the institution. Research demonstrates that student involvement outside the classroom influences students' satisfaction, intellectual growth, personal development, and persistence (Floerchinger, 1992; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Fraternity and sorority policies directly correlated to these outcomes and could be used when implementing and reporting the assessment.

Student learning and developmental outcomes have been established by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). The standards outline sixteen learning and development outcomes for fraternity/sorority affairs programs of quality: leadership development, intellectual growth, collaboration, social responsibility, effective communication, enhanced self-esteem, realistic self-appraisal, clarified values, career choices, healthy behavior, meaningful interpersonal relationships, independence, productive lifestyles, appreciating

diversity, spiritual awareness, and personal/educational achievement. These learning outcomes uphold the values of scholastic excellence, leadership, civic engagement, friendship, and life-long learning that are embraced by inter/national fraternal organization rituals and theoretically complement the university goals and framework (CAS, 2006).

Assessing a fraternity/sorority program utilizing a variety of methods ensures congruence between theory and practice. Many qualitative measures exist to assess these factors, including self-evaluation through CAS standards, benchmarking studies, surveys, and focus groups. The value of adding a cost-benefit analysis to the overall assessment process is that it helps establish a balance of both qualitative and quantitative data (Shuh and Upcraft, 2001). This blend is necessary to gain a total understanding of program effectiveness.

Case Study

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) conducted a cost-benefit analysis of its fraternity/sorority program in 2005 to assess its institutional impact for the 2004-2005 academic year. RIT, founded in 1829, is a private, technical institution enrolling more than 13,000 undergraduate students in eight colleges. It operates on a quarter system, houses one of the largest cooperative education programs in the world, and is home to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. The RIT student body is approximately 67% male and 33% female.

This report presents data from the 2004-2005 academic year, when 570 students, almost 5% of the RIT student body, were involved in fraternal organizations. During this time, RIT recognized 25 fraternal organizations (16 fraternities and 9 sororities), including five deaf/hard of hearing organizations, four predominantly African-American organizations, and three Latino-based organizations.

Five of the 25 organizations were housed in traditional residence halls and had access to basements, which served as kitchens and recreational/meeting rooms. These facilities were staffed by student resident assistants, who reported to residence life professional staff. Six additional chapters were housed in newly constructed houses (2001) around a fraternity/sorority “circle” located in a different section of campus. The Department of Housing Operations oversaw these facilities, and coordinated housing logistics with chapter presidents and officers. The remaining fourteen chapters were not housed on campus.

The fraternity/sorority program was coordinated by an Assistant Director of Campus Life/Coordinator of Fraternity and Sorority Life, housed in the Center for Campus Life under the Division of Student Affairs. The five governing councils each had an advisor. The Department of Public Safety investigated all misconduct and referred all cases to the Department of Student Conduct (within the Division of Student Affairs) for adjudication, with assistance from the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life.

This case study follows the same process used by the student affairs and fraternity/sorority professionals at RIT. The financial costs and benefits (see Table 2) are a hypothetical set of figures that demonstrate the principles of the process, approximated costs, and the retention effects. Due to privacy issues, the final figures yielded by the RIT study are not published.

Assessment Teams

The RIT cost-benefit analysis gathered data via two teams comprised of eighteen higher education professionals representing thirteen different campus departments (Fraternity and Sorority Affairs, Campus Life, Student Affairs Assessment, Budget and Financial Planning Services, Institutional Research, Development and Alumni Relations, Public Safety, University News, Residence Life, Housing Operations, Community Service Center, Student Conduct and Mediation Services, and the Student Affairs Vice President's Office).

The first team was an institutional team, comprised of representatives from each department that in some way contributed an expense or resource to the fraternity/sorority program. A cross-functional team of this nature is critical (Gioia & Thomas, 2000), as each participant is a stakeholder who will have a vested interest in seeing the results of the study. All team members contributed data available through their departments.

The institutional team provided four critical functions. First, the team established parameters regarding data use and dissemination. Budget information is often sensitive and guarded. Therefore, the format in which the information is presented and the method of approving final numbers had to be clarified to build stakeholder support. Second, team members ensured that information was accurately represented before it was released. This communication process helped the fraternity/sorority professional better understand the financial subculture within the institution, and develop a sense of camaraderie among the institutional team members. Finally, consistent with the overall goal of a cost-benefit analysis, the institutional team identified all potential costs and benefits for the fraternity/sorority program and provided acceptable guidelines that helped translate those into the appropriate dollar values.

The second team was a sub-group of the institutional team - a smaller, internal work team. This team consisted of staff members from within the Division of Student Affairs who planned the agenda for the upcoming meetings, completed work assignments to support the institutional team, and assisted with data collection and analysis.

Procedure

The institutional team convened at the onset of the analysis to introduce the project, explain its purpose, and develop expectations and deadlines for data retrieval. The institutional team identified staff to provide the data needed. Once expectations were outlined, the majority of communication took place via email and telephone. The team met in person midway through the process and to review the penultimate draft. The internal work team met more frequently to deal with the details and challenges of clarifying, documenting, and formulating information in a consistent manner.

Findings

Costs

The institutional team identified potential costs and benefits for the fraternity/sorority program (Table 2), discussing the particular nuances related to the university. Due to RIT's unique history of housing chapters in campus housing, key decisions were made regarding placement of costs

and benefits. For example, room and board were included as costs due to the real expenses associated with the housing system.

When determining Fraternity and Sorority Affairs staff salaries, amounts were determined directly from budget figures, or with calculations for part-time staff based upon time allocations. These included salary and benefits. Public Safety and Student Conduct charges included time for investigation of the cases specifically related to fraternity and sorority chapters including investigation, completion of paper work, and judicial hearing times when staff members were present. Other administrative and programming expenses, many paid for by student activities fees, were listed separately.

Costs were further specified as the analysis process evolved. One example was fraternity and sorority housing. During the 2004-2005 academic year, two departments worked in tandem to administer fraternity and sorority housing: Housing Operations and Residence Life. Each had different responsibilities regarding fraternity and sorority facilities. It is important to note that, during the cost-benefit analysis, extensive discussions occurred regarding what were legitimate charges for the fraternity/sorority program (as listed on the costs ledger depicted in Table 2) as opposed to charges or other expenses, which would have occurred regardless of the existence of the fraternity/sorority program due to pre-existing factors. It was finally decided that costs associated with operations related to fraternity and sorority residence halls would have existed regardless of who lived in the residence halls due to RIT's high demand for on-campus student housing. For example, deferred maintenance of parking lots, general utilities, and amortization of residence halls were considered university costs. This included the standard amount of time, translated into salary dollars, to oversee these areas. However, additional expenses incurred to accommodate fraternity and sorority presence in the halls (e.g., chapters' basement utilities and kitchen maintenance) were accounted for as fraternity/sorority program costs for the purpose of the analysis. Similarly, resident assistants, additional staff time, and other operational expenses were factored into the costs for the residence life staff.

To illustrate further, all expenses in the newly-constructed fraternity and sorority houses were considered costs. This included the amortization of debt of newly-constructed chapter houses, physical plant charges, public safety oversight, waste collection, telecommunications, insurance, grounds, and utilities. Housing Operations staff provided prorated estimates of time dedicated to the fraternity and sorority officers, alumni, and advisors, beyond what normally would have been dedicated to non-member residents. Meal plan costs were provided from Food Services and simply multiplied by the number of students enrolled, with profit being listed as a benefit.

Benefits

Schuh and Upcraft (2001) encourage all cost-benefit studies to examine a thorough listing of all potential benefit sources, regardless of whether they are proven to be benefits. In the RIT analysis, four potential benefits were identified.

Table 2Cost-Benefit Analysis Template (*Dollar values are not actual figures.*)

Costs		
1. Vice President's Office	Staff from the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs	\$2,000
2. Fraternity/Sorority Affairs Staff *	Coordinator of Fraternity and Sorority Life and percentage of Director's time	\$48,229
3. Additional Programming Staff	Stipend for graduate assistants, advisors of governing councils, and programmers	\$10,000
4. Student Conduct	Preparation and hearing hours	\$11,000
5. Public Safety	Responding to calls, investigations, hearings	\$9,500
6. Fraternity/Sorority Affairs Administrative Budget	Student staff, administrative costs, and programming costs	\$20,300
7. Greek Council Budget	Programming costs	\$20,469
8. Fraternity/Sorority Housing Related Costs		
a. Free-Standing Housing Expenses	Costs to maintain fraternity/sorority free-standing houses	\$603,142
b. Residence Hall Expenses	Costs to maintain fraternity/sorority residence halls	\$340,000
c. Housing Operations Personnel	Percentage of staff time servicing fraternities and sororities)	\$21,000
d. Resident Life: Resident Advisors	Room, board, and stipend for 6 RAs	\$46,060
e. Meal Plan Residence Halls		\$120,000
f. Meal Plan Free-Standing		\$110,000
9. Salaries and Benefits *		
Benefits		
10. Retention Impact	Based on 70% tuition (30% discount)	\$1,273,294
11. Public Relations: Newspaper Coverage	Advertising equivalency rate	\$23,997
12. Fraternity/Sorority Housing Related Benefits		
a. Free-Standing Housing Revenue and Charges	Rent and other housing related charges	\$605,142
b. Residence Halls Revenue and Charges	Rent and other housing related charges	\$388,577
c. Meal Plan Free-Standing	Revenue generated from fraternity/sorority meal plan	\$112,676
d. Meal Plan Residence Halls	Revenue generated from fraternity/sorority meal plan	\$140,000
13. Benefit to RIT and the Community		
Community Service Hours	Based on 6,532 hours @ \$17.55/hour	\$114,638
Philanthropy	Funds raised	\$20,107
Total Costs		\$ 1,447,200
Total Benefits		\$(2,678,431)
Final Balance		\$ 1,231,231

* Some numbers in this table have been changed in consideration of privacy; however, they generally parallel the end result of the study. It is important to note that during the real world practice at RIT, every potential cost and benefit was considered without prior knowledge as to the outcome of the study.

The first potential benefit was public relations. Fraternity/sorority professionals are familiar with the potential impact of positive and negative public attention. Ramifications could include either enthusiasm for or damage to the reputation of the fraternity/sorority community or university. The RIT institutional team felt that a true cost-benefit analysis must consider public relations. The staff of the University News department and University Public Relations Office, agreed that each article about fraternities or sororities had a net value (usually measured by the inch in one inch columns) equal to the cost of an advertisement that the university might otherwise have had to purchase. This value is referred to as the *advertising equivalency rate*. The internal team collected all articles accumulated for the 2004-2005 year from the University Public Relations Office and archives and, with simple calculations, determined a conservative estimate of the net value regarding public relations. During the designated year of this study, RIT did not experience negative press from its fraternity or sorority activities. If RIT had received negative press, the values would have been calculated in the same manner and then applied as negative values into the template in Table 2.

The second potential benefit was revenue generated from room and board associated with university-owned fraternity/sorority housing. When referencing Table 2, it is clear that the total housing and meal benefits (meaning revenue), listed under item 2, exceed the housing and meal costs, which are listed under item 8. Some of these costs will vary according to university systems.

Another potential benefit was philanthropy/community service. While philanthropic dollars were simply totaled and incorporated into the analysis, community service hours were calculated according to the value of labor hours. According to *Independent Sector* (2005), the value of community service hours was estimated at \$17.55 per hour. At RIT, when this formula was applied to the total number of community service hours contributed by the fraternity/sorority community, the dollar value exceeded \$114,000. In the final cost-benefit report, these benefits were listed in a highlighted section separated from the primary benefits, because they generally served the surrounding communities (i.e., agencies) and thus constituted a secondary benefit to the institution.

The final benefit was alumni giving. The Development Office provided information about fraternity and sorority alumni participation rates, showing that individuals involved in fraternities and sororities contributed to RIT at a significantly greater rate than non-members.

Persistence and Retention as a Financial Benefit

Retention was a critical, but unknown factor in this cost-analysis. However, enough data had been collected to complete a retention study and factor it into the final analysis. The retention study was not a small undertaking. The key component required to develop an effective study was membership information provided by chapters quarterly. In the case of this analysis, the retention study focused not only on persistence, but persistence to graduation. Like all other factors, a program's ability to attract and retain students is critical not only to student success, but also to the financial success of the institution. RIT measured this across a period of seven years, consistent with other retention studies (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

In this case, chapter membership files (including chapter cumulative grade point averages) had been maintained in the Fraternity and Sorority Affairs Office for almost a decade. The study (focusing on the time period of 2004-2005) utilized data from the membership rosters starting from the fall 1999 semester. Once names were collected, the graduation rate was calculated and compared to the overall university graduation rate. The results demonstrated an overall retention rate of 79% for fraternity/sorority members, as opposed to a lower retention rate for all non-affiliated students (which is proprietary confidential information that was not approved for release), thus representing a financial benefit for the institution. This is easy to calculate. For example, if the retention rate for all other students had been 69%, then the difference between fraternity/sorority affiliated and all other students would equal 10%. This would then be multiplied by the size of the fraternity/sorority community, representing the number of students in fraternal organizations who exceeded the graduation rate of their non-affiliated peers. When multiplying the value of tuition (minus room and board) by this number of students for the year of the study, the analysis demonstrated a financial benefit exceeding a million dollars.

During the analysis, it was important to work with staff from Enrollment Management to ensure appropriate adjustment of the charges to reflect tuition discounting. Tuition discounting is a common method used by many universities and colleges (especially private institutions) to reduce tuition costs for students of need and is typically offered as financial aid (K. Rogers, personal communication, October 2006). The discounting factoring used in this study, as shown in Table 4, was 0% percent of tuition.

Summary

After the values of each cost and benefit were entered into the template, the institutional team reviewed the document collaboratively to achieve a final evaluation and validation inclusive of their respective areas. During the process of completing the analysis, many of the team members had been contacted by e-mail or phone with questions and opportunities for feedback. Consequently, little of the information was new or unexpected.

Upon completing the cost-benefit analysis, the question still remains as to how the results can be applied to a fraternity/sorority program or the university. It is important to understand and use the results in a way that helps student affairs and other university professionals identify areas of strength and development for future assessment and program direction.

Implications

Interpreting the Analysis through ROI

Interpreting information on any assessment is critical. There are advantages and disadvantages to analyzing the results of a cost-benefit analysis. One advantage is that the analysis has an easy-to-read bottom line. However, this type of ledger format poses some challenges. Community members, and especially business people who are experts in the field, may be suspicious of tables, ledgers, and summaries that may not portray a complete picture. This suspicion may be amplified if they cannot see how different statistics in the ledger were calculated. Additionally, it can be cumbersome to explain the process used to create the ledger. Such a presentation requires an exacting description of process, numbers, and business rationale. Therefore, presentation of

the material and its interpretation becomes a lengthy and special process, which should be pursued with caution, practice, and preparation.

The greatest challenge can be that the bottom line is subject to misinterpretation, particularly if it reads as a negative balance. Consequently, the ROI, discussed previously in this article, becomes an important summary point by which results can be crystallized. In both the RIT scenario and case study using mock data (Table 2), the ROI was positive; benefits exceeded costs. This result would be considered by many stakeholders and economists to be a fortunate outcome in that the fraternity/sorority program is providing a return on the dollars being invested. However, it is not a guarantee of quality. Therefore, the cost-benefit analysis and ROI should be viewed with an analytical and cautious eye, and the limitations of its implications should similarly be addressed with all members of the internal and institutional teams at the beginning of the process. This will help maintain objectivity when interpreting the value of the numbers and outcomes of the assessment.

Specifically, it is important to note that a negative ROI does not necessarily create a bad business case for a fraternity/sorority program. Similarly, a positive ROI does not necessarily validate a positive business case for a fraternity/sorority program, or serve as an indicator of success. Evaluating the meaning of the data requires a discerning eye. Staff should be prepared to emphasize how the analysis acts as a tool for improvement.

Considering a Positive ROI

To demonstrate this concept, the figures in Table 2 reflect how the expenses associated with free-standing facilities are less than the corresponding revenue. The cost-benefit analysis not only confirms this, but quantifies the degree to which it occurs, provides insight, and poses critical questions for the future. These include: “How is cost-setting determined?”, “How can fraternity/sorority leaders maximize their rental fees?”, or “How might this impact future rental increases?” Obviously, some items contributed to creating a positive ROI. For example, public relations represented a single phenomenon that when factored into the equation, contributed positively to the program. However, this should not be taken for granted. Factors such as public relations and retention could change annually and may not be considered stable factors in future reports.

Additionally, it is possible that some factors (e.g., public relations or community service) could have a negative value in the ledger sheets of the analysis that is minimal, but the ROI would have still remained positive. This is because the decreased costs of these factors would not have exceeded the value of the difference between total costs and total benefits. In summary, while a positive ROI is certainly helpful, the cost-benefit analysis should still be used to highlight areas for future assessment and program development.

Considering a Negative ROI

The RIT scenario did not result in a negative ROI where costs exceeded benefits. This helped to demonstrate the educational value of the fraternity/sorority program. However, a negative ROI is not certain to condemn a program.

For example, the study may have demonstrated how the operational aspects of a university-owned housing system contributed to a negative bottom line. Housing costs are often controlled by university factors and have a significant effect on the bottom line of both the operations and the ROI. This is a large administrative burden that does not usually result from student behavioral issues or the health of the fraternity/sorority community.

In the same example, the public relations or community service factors could have shown fiscal benefits to the university and surrounding community. While this number may be impressive, it may be limited in that its positive return is occurring at a significantly lower rate of return than the housing expenditures. Hence, they may be outweighed by the negative impact of other, larger institutional factors. Consequently, the fraternity/sorority program could be very positive, while the study yields a negative ROI.

In other examples, it is possible that programmatic aspects related to behavior, standards, or university relations (i.e., public relations, conduct, and community service) have a negative influence on the ROI. These factors could place the fraternity/sorority program in jeopardy, regardless of the impact on the final ROI. A cost-benefit analysis helps identify these factors as areas for determining appropriate interventions. Hence, factors in the analysis, individually or in related subgroups, need to be scrutinized as studies are completed, shared, and processed.

Because this study served as the first of its kind at RIT, it established an institutional benchmark for future studies and programmatic changes, not only for the fraternity/sorority program, but for the assessment process as well. Applications for future use are still being considered. For example, if behavioral (conduct) issues were perceived to increase during a given year after the analysis was completed, a second analysis could be conducted to measure the amount of time (and subsequent costs) in examining and processing each case. When doing so, it is easier to gain additional insights into the type of time investment required as a result of this phenomena and the seriousness of the problem. Once completed, this study would be relatively easy for any university to replicate, because formulas and templates have been established. Additionally, staff members who participated in the study previously are better able to understand the process, the degree of staff support, and requirements by which to successfully complete it in a more efficient manner.

When considering the assessment process, the process and ledger together comprise a template. An annual or regular reenactment of the process will provide insights into how the assessment and analysis can be improved. Hence, the evaluation process continues in a two-fold manner, each complementing the other: the improving assessment process driving the administration's assessment of the fraternity/sorority program; the evolving program continually requiring additional assessment.

Dissemination

Regardless of the results, the analysis also provides important opportunities for goal setting. Just as each itemized cost or benefit can provide feedback regarding the value of a particular service to the fraternity/sorority program, it can mobilize student leaders, administrators, and advisors to establish positive goals. It can also serve as an impetus for student leaders who wish to encourage members to reduce behaviors or activities that have a negative impact on the program.

Open forums and discussions regarding the cost-benefit analysis can foster a positive sub-culture, while encouraging accountability through students' governing standard boards.

Conclusion

A cost-benefit analysis is an important assessment strategy through which fraternity/sorority professionals may demonstrate the value of their program through a team-oriented effort. When cross departmental partners are involved, it becomes more manageable to complete such an intensive assessment process. The data can provide staff, students, and other stakeholders with a road map to improve their fraternity/sorority program. The process is time intensive, but can provide information to demonstrate current strengths and areas of improvement for fraternal organizations. Through the application of this model at RIT, stakeholders were able to collect data to shape future practice.

References

- Astin, A. W. (1985). *Achieving educational excellence: A critical assessment of priorities and practices in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2006). *The book of professional standards for higher education*. Washington, DC: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.
- Dill, D. D. (2000). The management of academic culture: Notes on the management of meaning and social integration. In M. C. Brown (Ed.), *Organization & governance in higher education* (5th ed., pp. 261-272). [ASHE Reader Series]. Boston: Pearson.
- Fitz-enz, J. (2000). *The ROI of human capital: Measuring the economic value of employee performance*. New York: AMACOM.
- Floerchinger, D. (1992). Enhancing the role of student organization advisors in building a positive campus community. *Campus Activities Programming*, 26(6), 39-46.
- Gioia, D. A. & Thomas, J. B. (2000). Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. In M. C. Brown (Ed.), *Organization & governance in higher education* (5th ed., pp. 325-378). [ASHE Reader Series]. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Independent Sector (n.d.). *Research: Value of volunteer time*. Retrieved January 14, 2007, from http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html
- Kennedy, K., Moran, L., & Upcraft M. L. (2001). Assessing cost effectiveness. In Schuh, J. H. & Upcraft, M. L. (Eds.), *Assessment practice in student affairs: An applications manual* (pp. 175-195). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Levin H. M. & McEwan, P. J. (2001). *Cost-effectiveness analysis: Methods and applications 2*. New York: Sage Publications.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Perlow, E. (2007, Summer). Refresh, reframe, refocus: Using assessment as an improvement framework. *Perspectives*, 13-16.

Schuh, J. H., & Upcraft, M. L. (2001). *Assessment practice in student affairs: An applications manual* (pp. 175-213). San Francisco: Jossey -Bass.

Ward, H.O. (2006). *Return on investment*. Retrieved September 9, 2007 from http://images.autodesk.com/adsk/files/White-paper-Civil-3D-2006_ROI-R2_FINAL.pdf

Michael D'Arcangelo is the Director of Campus Life at Rochester Institute of Technology. He holds a Masters of Arts in Education (College Student Personnel) from Bowling Green State University and a Masters of Science in Human Resource Development from Rochester Institute of Technology. He is currently a doctoral student, enrolled in the Educational Leadership and Policy program at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Michael is a member of the Association of Fraternity Advisors, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Association of College Unions International, New York State College Student Personnel Student Association, and Theta Chi Fraternity. He may be contacted at mndccl@rit.edu.

Jessica R. Berner is the Assistant Director of Campus Life for Fraternity and Sorority Life at Rochester Institute of Technology. She holds a Masters of Science in Education (Counselor Education) from the State University of New York College at Brockport. Jessica is a Nationally Certified Counselor and a member of the Association of Fraternity Advisors, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Association of College Unions International, American Counseling Association, and Phi Sigma Sigma Fraternity. She may be contacted at jrbcccl@rit.edu.