



WILLIAM & MARY
CHARTERED 1693

Journal of Sorority and Fraternity
Life Research and Practice

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Article 3

January 2009

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Recommended Citation

Jackson, Amie and Iverson, Susan V. Ph.D. (2009) ““Step up and Do It”: Fraternity and Sorority Members’ Beliefs About Citizenship,” *Journal of Sorority and Fraternity Life Research and Practice*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25774/a4mw-pw60>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/oracle/vol4/iss1/3>

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“STEP UP AND DO IT”: FRATERNITY AND SORORITY MEMBERS’ BELIEFS ABOUT CITIZENSHIP

Amie Jackson and Susan V. Iverson, Ed.D.

This qualitative study sought to investigate fraternity and sorority members’ beliefs about citizenship and how students’ involvement in fraternities and sororities contributed to shaping their views on citizenship. Through focus groups and individual interviews with fraternity and sorority members at one private, research university in the Midwest, this study revealed students’ opinions on how their involvement in fraternities and sororities raised their awareness about social concerns, shaped their values, and modeled the necessity to take action in their community. Following a discussion of these findings, the authors propose suggestions for student affairs administrators to develop the role fraternities and sororities must play in fostering members’ citizenship development.

The development of citizenship, which includes civic values, civic responsibility, and commitment to civic life, in college students is a central goal of U.S. higher education (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Ehrlich, 2000; Sax, 2004). However, within the last 20 years, there has been increasing criticism of education’s effectiveness in meeting the challenge of cultivating students’ civic efficacy (Dionne, Drogosz, & Litan, 2003; Galston, 2003). Hillygus (2005) notes that “as universities move away from a broad liberal arts curriculum toward a more technical and specialized curriculum...we should be aware of the potential unintended consequences for democratic engagement” (p. 41).

Despite the criticism, community outreach and service by college students continues to proliferate. The results from a recent survey by the Institute of Politics at Harvard University reveal that student volunteerism is at an all-time high (Spiezio, 2002). Universities sustain growing numbers of philanthropic efforts, from community service offices to alternative spring break trips, and student-led outreach is often at the forefront of campus initiatives. Notably, fraternity and sorority members are equally and sometimes more engaged in community service than their non-affiliated peers (Hayek, Carini, O’Day, & Kuh, 2002). Further, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that affiliation in fraternal organizations has small, positive effects on civic engagement.

Scholars continue to raise important questions about the educational value of fraternities and sororities on college campuses (Mauk, 2006). Critics of the social fraternal system have pointed to research showing fraternity or sorority membership being associated with higher levels of alcohol use and abuse (Cashin, Presley, & Meilman, 1998; Danielson, Taylor, & Hartford, 2001; Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996), higher levels of sexual violence (Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991; Sanday, 1996), and lower levels of academic achievement (Pascarella et al., 1996).

However, benefits exist with fraternal membership (Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005; Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002; Mauk, 2006). Fraternities and sororities provide their members with opportunities for volunteerism and leadership development (Astin, 1993). Pike (2000) found that affiliated members had higher levels of involvement and cognitive development than did non-

affiliated students as a result of social involvement. Yet, there is a dearth of literature on the effects of membership on the development of citizenship. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate fraternity and sorority members' beliefs about citizenship and how students' involvement in fraternity and sorority life contributed to shaping their civic views.

The present analysis proceeds in three stages: first, a brief overview of the literature pertaining to citizenship in higher education; second, a description of findings from this study of fraternity and sorority members' beliefs about citizenship and how students' involvement in a fraternity or sorority contributed to shaping their views on citizenship; and third, the implication of these findings in light of citizenship goals and developmental opportunities.

Review of the Literature

Citizenship

Westheimer and Kahne (2003) defined three conceptions of a good citizen: 1) personally responsible, focused on the individual and rights; 2) participatory, recognizing the importance of community and the collective; and 3) justice oriented, building upon the collective with a critical lens. Abowitz and Harnish (2006) mapped multiple citizenship discourses described by U.S. citizenship education texts, noting citizenship, as practiced in schools, is predominantly taught as a civics lesson—"factual consumption of American history, geography, and government, combined with varying degrees of patriotic identity and the liberal virtue of tolerance for difference" (p. 680). However, they illuminate alternatives (e.g., feminist and cultural discourses) that challenge dominant conventions of citizenship and suggest these alternatives could be inspiring ways for students to practice citizenship (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006).

Dominant conceptions of citizenship (e.g., personally responsible) can limit ways in which it may be exercised, such as voting, and risk citizenship becoming "civic voyeurism--watching other people ...act like citizens" (Parker, 1996, p. 12). As Westheimer and Kahne (2003) noted, the ways people conceptualize citizenship has significant implications for their civic engagement, for the design of educational environments, and for educational policy.

What contributes to the development of effective citizenship or engaged citizens? Eyler and Giles (1999), who recognized deep linkages between service-learning and the development of citizenship knowledge, identified five dimensions that comprise effective citizenship: values, knowledge, skills, efficacy, and commitment. Values are evident in students' feelings of social responsibility. Students' recognition of what "I ought to do," Eyler and Giles observed, "provides powerful motivation for involvement" (p. 157). Students also need knowledge, "the expertise and cognitive capacity to make intelligent decisions about what needs to be done" (p. 159). Further, students must acquire practical experience and interpersonal skills to be effective. Being effective also "depends on the willingness to take the risk of involvement, which depends on personal self-confidence"—what Eyler and Giles termed efficacy (p. 161). Finally, the "ultimate test" of effective citizenship, according to Eyler and Giles, is the commitment to do something.

The Role of Higher Education

Astin (1997) asserted that higher education plays a critical role in producing democratic citizens.

When it comes to describing its educational mission, the typical college or university will use language such as 'preparing students for responsible citizenship,' 'developing character,' 'developing future leaders,' 'preparing students to serve society,' and so forth. ... [I]f we are to believe our own rhetoric, those of us who work in the academy see ourselves as serving the society and promoting and strengthening our particular form of democratic self-government. (pp. 210-211)

However, concerns abound about the effectiveness of higher education in achieving its mission. Derek Bok observed that "universities are disassociated with the civic missions on which they were founded – missions that assumed responsibility for preparing students for active participation in a democratic society and developing students' knowledge for the improvement of communities" (as cited in Gibson, 2001, p. 11).

Some scholars believe the challenge of preparing students for effective citizenship resides in students entering college with different assumptions about what it means to be civically engaged. For instance, Sax and Astin (1998), citing increased apathy towards politics reported by entering first-year students, noted the number of students who believe it is important to stay up-to-date with political affairs has dropped by more than 50% in the past 30 years. A survey by the Institute of Politics at Harvard University revealed that political participation of first-year college students is at an all-time low (Spiezio, 2002), and Ehrlich (2000) adds that the individualistic nature of our society contributes to a decline of civility, mutual respect, and tolerance for others. Yet, in the face of these challenges, higher education continues to deploy strategies—in and out of the classroom—for providing educational and empowering citizenship experiences.

The Impact of Fraternal Membership

One of the founding purposes for most fraternal organizations is to provide an environment that affords individuals the opportunity for personal growth, while facilitating an understanding of interdependence that is critical in developing good citizens (Mauk, 2006). The founding principles of fraternities and sororities provide an ideal framework for citizenship development. Terms such as social responsibility, integrity, honesty, goodness, truth, equality, and honor permeate fraternity and sorority creeds, missions, and purpose statements and are consistent with characteristics of citizenship (Earley, 1998). Earley, in her examination of how fraternal organizations influence moral development, found the implementation of service projects by affiliated members had a positive effect on their moral development. She noted, "by interacting with people from various communities, Greek [sic] members can recognize their impact on others. In this way, fraternities and sororities can foster commitment to other causes, people, and communities" (p. 41). Mathiasen (2005), in his case study of the effects of one fraternity on students' moral development, found the organization had a positive influence. He identified four themes – encouraging community service, recruiting quality students, emphasizing moral development, and upholding chapter traditions and reputation – as key contributors to enhancing students' moral development.

Several scholars have found links between involvement in fraternal membership and students' cognitive development. Randall and Grady (1998) determined that time constraints involved in membership detract from cognitive development (see also Pascarella et al., 1996). The effects are greatest in the first year of college and are much less pronounced in the second and third years; also, however, fraternal affiliation over time had a net negative effect on cognitive development

in men but a positive effect on women (Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2006). Randall and Grady recommend implementing activities that cultivate critical thinking such as service projects with a self-reflection component. They argue that the development of higher-ordered cognitive skills allows students to “become better scholars and stronger members of fraternity or sorority chapter [sic], and thus valuable contributors to the institutional learning community” (p. 36).

This belief is supported by a growing body of research demonstrating the positive relationship between one’s cognitive development and engagement in service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rhoads, 1997). Further, the development of critically-conscious thinking – acquiring skills to analyze, interpret, make judgments, and choose a course of action informed by more sophisticated understandings of social power and its implications – is important to the goals of education in a democratic society (Allan & Iverson, 2004).

Community outreach is one of the most visible contributions by which affiliated students put into practice stated principles of service and citizenship. This helps them appreciate how their actions affect other communities, and it integrates those principles into their daily lives (Earley, 1998). Yet, some have argued there is a widening gap between the professed principles of fraternities and sororities and the reality of their practice on college campuses (Kuh, Pascarella, & Weschler, 1996, April 19). Further, scholars critique programs that fail to move beyond personal development and charitable, episodic volunteerism to civic action or social responsibility (Gibson, 2001; Rhoads, 1997). Thus, while a relationship exists between involvement in fraternal organizations, participation in service efforts, and students’ development, it is unclear in what ways students’ involvement contributes to their beliefs about citizenship.

Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate fraternity and sorority members’ beliefs about citizenship and how students’ involvement in fraternal organizations contributes to shaping their views on citizenship. This section describes the methods of this study, which employed focus groups and individual interviews.

Site and Sample

The site for this study was a private, research university in the Midwest. Of the nearly 10,000 students enrolled, about 40% were undergraduates. There were 17 fraternities and 7 sororities, and the membership within these chapters equated to more than one-third of the undergraduate population. The mission of the Fraternity and Sorority Life Office asserts that all individuals and organizations must aspire toward the attainment of certain values including “honesty and integrity,” “mutual respect and support,” “responsibility in all our thoughts and deeds,” “accountability in our actions,” and “equitable treatment of others.”

Consistent with purposive sampling procedures, participants were “selected on the criteria that they would have something to say on the topic, [were] within the age-range, [had] similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other” (Rabiee, 2004, p. 655). The participants for this study were also selected to reflect the student membership in the fraternal community, spanning sophomore through senior class standing. First-year students were excluded from the sample, since they were neither exploring potential fraternity membership nor

eligible for sorority recruitment in their first year. Further, participants were specifically selected to explore the range of beliefs about citizenship in the population (Khan & Manderson, 1992). The sample consisted of 16 students ranging from 18-23 years old, who were active in the fraternal community. While participants were predominately White, the sample also represented voices of a Hispanic female and two Asian students.

Data Collection

This study employed a multi-phase, data collection process utilizing focus groups and individual interviews. Focus groups are designed to gather information primarily about beliefs, values, and understanding (Khan & Manderson, 1992), and thus, were an appropriate method of data collection for this study of beliefs about citizenship. Focus groups coupled with interviews solicit unique perspectives for the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Morgan, 1997). Prior to data collection, the researchers received Human Subject Committee approval, along with the written consent of each participant. Pseudonyms are used for references to participants.

Initially, two focus groups were conducted. The first focus group was comprised of six students (four male, two female), and the second focus group was comprised of six students (three male, three female). The focus group discussions were guided by open-ended prompts intended to elicit participants' beliefs about citizenship and civic experiences at the University. This approach enabled ideas and themes to emerge in the context of the dialog; provided evidence of ways differences in perspectives are resolved and consensus is built; and demonstrated how participants interpret a key term, such as citizenship (Rabiee, 2004). Participants were encouraged to speak freely, raise issues important to them, and support their responses with examples from their undergraduate experience and more specifically their participation in fraternity and sorority life. The focus groups were 90 minutes in length and were facilitated by the primary researcher, videotaped, and transcribed for analysis.

To obtain more detailed information of participants' beliefs about citizenship, four in-depth interviews were conducted with two sophomores, one junior, and one senior. Two of the interview participants were active leaders and two were emerging leaders. These interviews were designed to elicit differences and similarities across class standing in students' beliefs about citizenship and civic experiences in the fraternal community. A semi-structured interview protocol was followed. Interview notes were maintained, and member checking ensured accuracy in data collection.

Participants from the two focus groups were also invited to participate in a follow-up session. This follow-up focus group with 14 (previous) participants provided an opportunity for participants to review, modify, validate, elaborate, and clarify their (previous) responses. Further, this meeting enabled clarification and amplification of emergent themes, and an opportunity to search out and include negative instances.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis occurred concurrently with data collection. Krueger suggests thinking about this process as a "continuum of analysis ranging from the mere accumulation of raw data to the interpretation of data" (as cited in Rabiee, 2004, p. 657). This study employed "framework analysis" (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), an analytic process that involved distinct though highly

interconnected stages. This non-linear, overlapping process began at the point of data collection, through familiarity with the data while listening to tapes and recording observational notes. Then, the researchers independently employed inductive analysis to identify themes, ideas, or concepts arising from the data, clustering words and stretches of text, and identifying a shared list of codes. The next step involved “indexing” the data, a process of sorting out quotations and making comparisons across data sources. A descriptive framework began to emerge. The final step, “charting,” involved lifting quotations and rearranging them under thematic headings.

Reliability and Credibility

Data collection and analyses were multi-layered and iterative, with new data used to assess the integrity of the developing analysis. The use of independent coding coupled with comparing codes for agreement contributed to inter-rater reliability (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Martaeu, 1997). Further, the triangulation of data sources and member checking contributed to the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Limitations

Data were collected at only one institution, limiting this study’s generalizability. However, the researchers did not intend to draw generalizable conclusions; rather, the findings from this study are offered as a perspective on fraternity and sorority members’ beliefs about citizenship and how students’ involvement in fraternity and sorority life at one university contributed to shaping their views on citizenship. Second, the use of focus groups, rather than exclusive use of interviews, and the small sample size could be viewed as limiting factors. However, the intentionality in sampling procedures, searching out and including negative instances, member checking, and use of independent and comparative coding were employed to limit researcher bias in data collection and analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Further, the multi-method collection of data (interviews, focus groups) contributes to a more robust research design (Morgan, 1997).

Findings and Interpretations

Analysis revealed three dominant themes: (1) Awareness, (2) Values, and (3) Action. For each of these themes, the authors will illustrate with quotations the ways in which participants identified how their involvement in fraternity and sorority life shaped their views on citizenship.

Awareness: “You need to know yourself”~Amanda

Participants believed that an awareness and understanding of one’s self, community, and role within the community were essential to their conception of citizenship. As Amanda, a junior, succinctly stated, as a citizen “you need to know yourself.” Several observed that this awareness and understanding does not occur suddenly, but instead evolves over time, and at times only upon reflection is one aware of one’s role within a community. For instance, Angie, a senior, considered what shaped her understanding of citizenship:

I don’t think there is just one moment; it is all the little things and watching people take care of each other. For example, one day when it was raining and I was walking across the street, my bag flew open and three people stopped to help me. These things help to make your community a little better.

Greg, also a senior, added that this awareness of one's self as a citizen occurs when you take someone else's needs or interests into account: "It can be as simple as opening the door for someone or letting someone else go ahead of you in the line. Anytime you make a small gesture or sacrifice that perhaps takes away from you but gives something greater to someone else."

Mike, a sophomore, echoed these observations that no single moment contributes to one's awareness of one's self as a citizen, but that it is "more of a progression." Mike reflected upon his experience in a military high school, his adherence to rules and standards, and his participation in leadership and service opportunities. However, he emphasized, it was not until he "realized that [his] decisions and actions not only affected [him] but everyone in [his] unit" that he began to understand himself as a member of a community, and thus his role as a citizen.

In response to questions about how fraternity and sorority life contributed to shaping their awareness, participants identified the ways in which this involvement pushed individuals to see how they are situated in a larger context. For instance, Nathan, a junior, noted, "when you come to college you think you know what is ... going on in the world," but involvement in fraternity and sorority life is "an eye opening experience," revealing "opportunities you didn't know existed and seeing how these things have an impact and can improve you as a citizen." He offered as an example his involvement in a service project in which his fraternity served dinner to the homeless. This experience challenged him to reflect on his own privilege; the fact that he would leave this soup kitchen and return to his dining hall on campus. He began to consider the "big picture," meaning his awareness of the diversity of lived human experiences within the same city in which he attended college: "you do not see those things unless you get out there." Brian, a sophomore, shared a similar experience, reflecting upon his alternative spring break trip with his fraternity brothers. He noted that the town where they stayed "was night and day from where we are from. These new experiences help to open your mind to the world."

While service experiences were a prominent example of how one's involvement in a fraternity or sorority impacts an evolving understanding of one's self in a community, other evidence emerged. For example, Derek, a sophomore, described how meetings of the Panhellenic Council and the Interfraternity Congress (the governing boards for the fraternal communities) helped to reveal that each individual is part of something larger. He noted that at these meetings he sees that matters impact more than just him or one chapter, but "you see 18 fraternities which is what a nation is; it is a community." He added that a "certain socialization happens;" noting that "forty guys with all different views [undergo] an educational process because you have the larger community."

Sonya, a junior, echoed some of Derek's sentiments in her assertion that fraternity and sorority life provided an excellent framework for understanding one's role within the community, and how this awareness "is quite transferable to being a good citizen." She elaborated:

Each chapter is like its own individual society and learning how to function within that society and learning your role and how you impact others and they impact you. You learn how to respect other people. In terms of elections, you have to stand up in front of the group and say this is who I am and this is what I do and I need you to see me in this role. It teaches you to look beyond day-to-day and see how it all figures in. ... It forces you to evaluate yourself and others in your society.

Participants articulated the importance of coming to know one's self, and that through growing self-awareness, one sees oneself as part of something larger. The students' comments echoed Eyler and Giles' (1999) identification of students' need to acquire knowledge -- "the expertise and cognitive capacity to make intelligent decisions about what needs to be done" (p. 159). This awareness is one of several dimensions of citizenship.

Values: "Are we being good to each other?"~Sonya

A second theme emerging from analysis was values. Once an awareness and understanding of self, community, and role within the community are acquired, participants amplified the feelings of social responsibility, feelings of connectedness to their community, and a commitment and accountability to these learned values in their decision-making. As Angie, a senior, stated, one is responsible for "holding yourself accountable and holding others accountable;" which means "not only being responsible for yourself and not just your brothers and sisters [in Fraternity and Sorority Life], but for everyone's actions." Christine, a junior, echoed this expectation: "We have a strong sense of responsibility. If you do something wrong, we expect a knock on the door or a bunch of emails from the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life."

Participants were quick to connect the values of their fraternal community and the standards and expectations articulated by their fraternity or sorority as the guidepost for behaving as a "good citizen." Greg, a senior, observed the way in which chapter rituals, in particular, teach these community values and self-responsibility.

You first begin to see it [community values] and think [about] it [as a new member], but as an older member, you start to memorize it and perform it. Every time you go through [chapter ritual], you learn more about being a good person and citizen because it teaches the values that we all hold. Ultimately, however, it is the actions that you take as a result of thinking about these rituals and values that make you a good citizen.

Sonya, a junior, also referred to the importance of rituals for instilling shared values and fostering citizenship.

Our chapter gets together to discuss how our actions affect other people's thoughts and feelings: Are we being good to each other? Are we practicing our values? If not, why? What is the problem? It is a time of introspection but it is also a time to look at your relationships with one another and that fosters really good citizenship.

Further, Greg emphasized the importance of "using our values from Greek Life and our chapters to better the community and to hold ourselves to standards," underscoring that "the more we hold to our values in a public setting, the better citizens we are going to be."

For several participants, the internalization of community values was evidence of personal integrity. As Sonya noted, "integrity and being true to your character is really important," adding that "Greek Life stresses values and forces you to assess whether you are holding true to your values."

Internalizing community values and holding oneself accountable to community standards contributed to values-based decision-making. For instance, Greg emphasized the importance of consulting his values before making decisions. He recognized that he was not likely to do this before each decision, but the more he did, the better citizen he would become. Mike extended

this belief, noting that "a good citizen should not only utilize [his or her] values to make decisions but also maintain respect for how the community operates and maintain respect for the individuals you are serving and their decisions and [his or her] own personal values." Sonya further amplified the importance of "holding true to your values" when making decisions and added that individuals must "look outside yourself to see how other chapters function. ... Taking time to learn about other chapters and their values and what they stand for helps you be a good citizen because you take into account the whole community around you." Participants' values are evident in their feelings of social responsibility, what Eyler and Giles identify as what one "ought to do" (p. 157). Increasing internalization of these values contributes to the development of personal self-confidence and the willingness to take risks, such as standing up for one's beliefs.

Action: "Step up and do it"~Greg

A final theme emerging from analysis was action. This theme is exemplified by Greg's declaration: "if you have the capability to do something, then it is your responsibility to step-up and do it." Whereas values were evident in students' commitment, responsibility, and the internalization of community standards, action is the performance of these internalized beliefs. In this theme, individuals emphasized the necessity to take action and initiative; to stand up and speak out. For instance, Mike noted, "it is your actual involvement rather than a title that will make a difference." Tim asserted, "many of us have future goals that have to do with helping people; however, instead of sitting around and waiting, we should try to help people now ... You do not need a degree to have an impact on the world."

Nathan observed that "contributing is more of a process than one single action. It takes people to organize and make the plans, so if that is their way of contributing and making a difference, then that is what they should do." Several others echoed this call to "get involved and take action" (Christine); to "use service and philanthropy to improve your community" (Brian); to "utilize your strengths to improve society" (Greg); and to "help others" (Angie).

For a few participants, sometimes the best action to take was to step aside. For, as Amanda articulated, being a citizen is not a solo act, but rather taking action in the context of a community and in relationship to others.

We just had elections for [my sorority] and I had already fulfilled my service to the chapter serving on the executive board but some individuals in the chapter wanted me to run for president. I felt that I needed to step back from the situation and let someone else take that role because they would do better. It was important for me to recognize... that someone could do it better than me.

Similarly, Tim reflected on the importance of collaboration and participatory leadership when he started a student organization:

I sought individuals to get involved but was not having much luck and thought people were being self-centered and selfish. I realized that it was more self-centered of me to ask them to help me; they were putting their energy in other things where they had the motivation to get things done. This year, people have stepped up to help me and I help them in their areas of interests.

These students had discovered the importance of not only taking individual action, but also of the need for mutuality, reciprocity, and compromise, enabling collective action.

The participants in this study stressed that taking action, fulfilling one's responsibility, making a difference, and helping others are essential ingredients in their conception of citizenship. As Christine explained, "If you don't do what is required of you, then something is going to fall through. It gives you a sense of responsibility, which is integral in terms of citizenship." Mike also observed, "The willingness to give something of yourself to others is where citizenship begins." Finally, Sonya noted that fulfilling this responsibility can be challenging when you feel alone in standing up for what you believe. She illustrated this with an example of a controversial vote within Fraternity and Sorority Life on inviting a new chapter to the campus. "I felt a strong internal conflict. I wanted to do what was best for the community. Every other chapter voted yes... but I felt that I had to stand up for what I believed and I had to vote no" (Sonya).

Of note, several participants, when asked how fraternity and sorority life contributed to shaping their views on citizenship, observed shortcomings between a professed commitment on the part of the fraternal community to cultivate good citizens and the potential to realize this commitment through their experiences as part of it. Participants advocated for improvements in facilitating students' civic awareness and involvement; bolstering students' understanding of democratic process and the potential for their voice in this process; and strengthening students' orientation toward values-based decision-making. The implications of their observations for practice will be discussed below.

Discussion

Participants' views on citizenship were evident in their descriptions of gaining awareness, understanding the values of their community and how these values informed their decision-making, recognizing they are part of and accountable to something greater, and taking action and making a difference in their community. As Angie considered, "maybe being a good citizen is not about doing the easy thing." As Ehlich (2000) notes, being civically engaged means not only having the desire to want to make a difference within your community, but also utilizing a combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to be an actively engaged citizen. Viewed in this way, citizenship can be understood not as a static identity, but instead as a continuum of behaviors.

These findings can inform practitioners' efforts to structure programs and interventions that would support the development of students' competencies as effective citizens. First, it is necessary to build awareness of the community and self to expand awareness of one's self in a broader social context. Such awareness is an important developmental shift in students' cognitive growth, illuminating a student's ability "to construct knowledge in a contextual world, an ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and an ability to engage in relationships without losing one's internal identity" (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 12).

Such changes appear foundational to subsequent growth as a citizen; students must first "know" before they can proceed to "do something" about what they know (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Also, awareness contributes to the realization of one's strengths and weaknesses and provides an opportunity to truly reflect upon personal values and how to use them to inform decisions. It is also important to develop individuals' awareness of the community and its needs. This begins to connect individuals to a cause about which they feel passionate and want to make a difference.

Second, motivated by a sense of social responsibility – what Eyler and Giles (1999) refer to as “I ought to do” – students who feel increasingly connected to their communities are motivated for involvement. Coupled with an awareness of social issues and one’s role in society, this connectedness can lead to active citizenship (Eyler & Giles). One can begin to recognize that societal issues are perpetuated by a lack of knowledge about these issues, which may inspire questions about the root causes of the problems (Rhoads, 1997). This newfound perspective lends itself to educating individuals about their civic efficacy to identify and utilize all avenues to make a difference. Finally, once motivated to act, it is necessary to cultivate the skills necessary to make a difference. It is the attainment of these skills that empowers individuals to enact the awareness, values, and commitment they have developed.

Recommendations

Higher education practitioners have an obligation to design programs that will help students develop as effective citizens (Hamrick, 1998). Recognizing various conceptions of citizenship exist, practitioners can shape environments that can challenge and support students’ development as active citizens. This section offers recommendations for practitioners to cultivate the role fraternities and sororities must play in fostering members’ citizenship development.

1. Connect members with transformative community service to develop their “abilities for critical thinking and group problem-solving, their commitments and values, and the skills they need for effective citizenship” (Cousins, 1994, p. 1). Participating in service projects can allow students to understand how certain actions affect others’ welfare; it also contributes to further development of their awareness, knowledge, and skills as engaged citizens (Earley, 1998; Gibson, 2001). Since fraternity and sorority outreach already (generally) focuses on charitable, altruistic forms of service, members could be encouraged to implement projects that extend beyond one-time philanthropic efforts. The challenge for practitioners is to design empowering service experiences that are more than episodic volunteerism promoting charity, and instead develop students’ abilities to enact civic activism “concentrating on root causes of social problems, politics, and the need for structural change” (Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000, p. 44). Consistent with Rhoads’ (1997) call for critical community service, students’ enactment of change-oriented community outreach enables greater understanding of community needs; increased likelihood that students will see the impact of their work, and holds the most potential for cultivating critical thinking and civic consciousness.
2. Engage in critical discussions about citizenship. Too often, the sole message students receive about their responsibility as a citizen is to vote. However, alternative conceptions were emphasized by the students in this study. Their active participation in their communities – both leadership within the fraternal community and through community service – enabled them to further develop their understanding of what it means to be an effective citizen. Higher education practitioners can facilitate conversations and design activities with affiliated students that can build cognitive complexity and stimulate individuals to see and understand experiences in different ways. As Putnam (2002) observed, “the way we teach students about community engagement and political

participation is likely to have a powerful and long lasting effect on the way younger Americans think about the problems and possibilities of achieving an authentically democratic society” (¶5).

3. Empower and support students to speak out. It is critical, once students know what they “ought to do” (Eyler & Giles, 1999), to develop students’ skills to act on their civic commitment. Baier and Whipple (1990) found affiliated students in leadership positions may have a clear sense of what should be done but may struggle with doing the right thing for fear of peers’ rejection, retaliation, and alienation. As Earley (1998) notes, “students must be educated and supported in efforts to question and change norms” (p. 42). Higher education practitioners, and in particular administrators and advisors involved with fraternities and sororities, can influence this process by engaging students in constructive debate about how specific norms and rituals may support or impede their organizational principles.

Conclusion

Today’s society needs its citizens to be more engaged in the community through both political and non-political realms. University administrators need to assume greater responsibility for educating students about the values, knowledge, and skills needed for effective citizenship. Fraternal membership is a promising venue for learning civic values and practicing civic engagement. Involvement exposes students to the meaning of being a part of a community and helps members understand their role within that community. It is important for administrators working with students to design campus plans to develop competent citizens using the resources of the institution, community, and the individual chapters.

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