Fraternal Leadership: Differences in Leadership Practices Among Four Governing Councils

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FRATERNAL LEADERSHIP: DIFFERENCES IN LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AMONG FOUR GOVERNING COUNCILS

Anthony Nicholas DiChiara

In this study three hundred members of fraternities and sororities at a large, public, land-grant institution located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States responded to the items of Kouzes & Posner's Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). The results of the study were used to determine the leadership practices of the respondent group and the chapter members representing the four governing councils for fraternities and sororities at the host institution. Additionally, this study sought to identify the differences in leadership practices among members of the four governing councils. The results of the study indicated no significant differences in leadership practices subscales between members of the governing councils. Significant differences were found in specific SLPI items between the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and Panhellenic Council (NPC), and differences were also found between the IFC/NPC and the United Council of Fraternities & Sororities (UCFS) councils. This study has practical implications for professionals who work closely with fraternities and sororities through understanding the leadership practices of members.

Co-curricular involvement improves the quality of interpersonal relationships students have throughout their undergraduate experience. One way in which students can optimize their ability to further their own development is to become involved on campus (Astin, 1993). Although it is important to obtain the basic skills needed to accomplish tasks in any occupation, other skills are necessary to be successful in the job market, for example, interpersonal skills, time management skills, and leadership skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Specifically, college students must take a proactive role to enhance their experiences. They have a variety of ways to take advantage of leadership opportunities on their respective campuses. One specific area of involvement that provides a number of opportunities for leadership development is membership in a fraternity or sorority.

Approximately 800 colleges and universities across the country host fraternities and sororities (North-American Interfraternity Conference, 2006). However, disagreement still exists about whether or not membership in a fraternity or sorority is beneficial to college students. Positive outcomes associated with fraternity/sorority membership include leadership development (Astin, 1993), retention (Astin, 1984), and high levels of involvement and psychosocial development (Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001). On the other hand, negative perceptions of fraternity/sorority membership also exist on college campuses. Incidents of hazing, rape, and abuse of alcohol/illegal drugs have become ingrained in the fraternity/sorority lifestyle, and overshadow the positive aspects of membership (Hayek et al., 2002).

College students have the ability to learn and develop skills outside the classroom that will lead to success post graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). One important area in which students tend to have the most meaningful development is organization leadership (Posner, 2004). Specifically, students can develop useful skills as campus leaders within the fraternity/sorority community (Hayek, et al., 2002). Through membership in fraternities and sororities, students are

provided a wide variety of opportunities to accumulate skills that will help them be successful beyond their undergraduate years.

Current studies on fraternity and sorority leadership practices have sought to identify differences associated with gender (Adams & Keim, 2000; Snyder, 1992) or ethnicity (Williams, 2002). However, these studies were limited to one particular institution and focused on only two councils. In addition, it is possible that differences in leadership practices may exist due to differences in organizational focus (i.e. service, academic, social, values-based).

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership practices of students affiliated with fraternities and sororities. In addition, this study explored the differences in leadership practices specifically among members of fraternities and sororities belonging to the four governing councils present at the site of the study. Data were collected by administering the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI, Kouzes & Posner, 2006) to affiliated members of fraternities and sororities. This study was designed specifically to address the following research questions:
1. What are the leadership practices, as measured by the SLPI, of affiliated members of the fraternity/sorority community and the leadership practices of chapter members relative to their respective governing council?
2. What are the differences that exist in leadership practices, as measured by the SLPI, between the members of the four governing councils?

This study has significance for practical use, particularly in fraternity and sorority advising. The results offer information that can be used by these administrators to learn more about the members of their governing councils and can assist in the development and implementation of more effective programming initiatives focused on these students.

Review of the Literature

Leadership and College Students
Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998) defined leadership as a relational process whereby a group of individuals is attempting to make a change to benefit the common good. Astin (1985, 1993) indicated that the periods of time when individuals attend college are intricate points where students experience personal, social, and professional growth. During the course of the college experience, students have many opportunities to get involved in the campus community and assume leadership roles. The body of literature on student leadership has provided support for the notion that leadership engagement contributes positively to the college experience (Astin 1985; Astin 1993; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Louge, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). Cress et al. (2001) found that student leaders showed improved results in areas such as civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theories, and personal and societal values from participation in leadership education and training programs.

Research comparing leadership practices among different fraternity/sorority constituents has shown very little difference between groups on the basics of gender or race (Adams & Keim, 2000; Snyder, 1992; Williams, 2002). Little research exists that addresses the differences in

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leadership practices among members of all governing councils on college campuses, whose differences include race, gender, and other factors that separate chapters into their respective governing councils. The intent of this study is to contribute to the current literature on leadership practices among fraternity/sorority governing councils and broaden the understanding of differences between them to assist student affairs professionals to develop and implement programs that will cater to the needs of these student groups.

Outcomes of Fraternity/Sorority Membership

Members of fraternities and sororities are among the most researched student populations in higher education (Blackburn, 2003). Given the wide body of literature on these students, a debate between the positive and negative influences the fraternity/sorority system exerts on the students involved has emerged. One of the most significant, positive effects of membership in a fraternity or sorority is the higher level of retention between the first and second years of college (DeBard, Lake, & Binder, 2006; Tripp, 1997). Membership in a fraternity or sorority has been shown to increase levels of personal competition between members, which encourages these members to be more active in the campus community (Tripp, 1997).

Members of fraternities and sororities tend to be more engaged in other campus activities, which decreases the likelihood of dropping out (Astin, 1984). In addition, Hunt & Rentz (1994) established that affiliated members who become more involved in other campus activities reinforce an overall sense of purpose and enhance the gains in other areas of identity and moral development. Astin (1984) has shown that the greater a student's involvement in college, the greater the gains of student learning and development. Therefore, in addition to keeping members in school, membership in a fraternity or sorority encourages engagement in the campus community.

Hayek et al. (2002) found that members of fraternities and sororities display equal, if not greater, levels of engagement in academically-challenging tasks, active learning, faculty interaction, community service, and personal development gains. Pike (2003) reported that the positive effects of membership in fraternities or sororities were stronger for seniors than for freshmen. This was confirmed with Pascarella, Flowers, and Whitt (2001), who found that the negative effects of fraternity/sorority membership were less evident during the upper-class years of members' college careers.

Membership in fraternities and sororities also provides students with opportunities to gain leadership experience and develop their leadership styles (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1982). These experiences benefit affiliated students in their careers upon graduation, including preparation and skill (Semersheim, 1996). Several studies compare leadership practices by members of the fraternity/sorority community (Adams & Keim, 2000; Snyder, 1992; Williams, 2002). These studies used the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) (Kouzes & Posner, 2006) to identify differences in leadership practices among groups.

Method

Sample Selection

The sample population consisted of undergraduate students of a major research institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Participants were affiliated members of a fraternity or sorority governed by one of four governing councils. In addition to using convenience sampling, this study used qualifying criteria (enrollment status and membership standing) to identify individuals able to participate.

The sample consisted of four groups, representing the four governing councils. The affiliated members of the individual chapters governed by each council made up the participants included in each group. Each individual selected to participate had to meet certain criteria, including being enrolled as a full-time student and being a member of an organization governed by one of the four governing councils. These criteria were met by asking the chapter presidents to ensure all members on their rosters were full-time students and active by the chapter's standards. Participants who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

At the site of the study, the fraternity/sorority community makes up approximately 15% of the undergraduate population, and these members hold more than half of the student leadership positions on campus (personal communication, Norman, 2006). Four governing councils oversee the 68 active fraternity and sorority chapters. These councils are the Interfraternity Council (IFC), the Panhellenic Council (NPC), the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), and the United Council of Fraternities and Sororities (UCFS). The IFC serves as the governing body for 39 social fraternities; all members of IFC organizations are male. NPC is the governing body for 13 social sororities. The NPHC is the representative governing body for the seven historically black fraternities and sororities at the host institution. Finally, the governing body of the 9 multicultural and special-interest fraternities and sororities is the UCFS. IFC and NPC chapters tend to focus on the social aspects of membership, whereas NPHC and UCFS chapters focus more on service to the community (personal communication, Preston J., 2002).

Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI)

For this study, the self-assessment of the SLPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2006) was used. The instrument consisted of 30 items that are divided into five sections. The SLPI was chosen for this study, because it identified different aspects of leadership practices of college students. The SLPI provided an alternative view of the differences of these leadership practices amongst the four governing councils of the fraternity/sorority community. The instrument requires participants to respond to statements that related to them on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*rarely or seldom*) to 5 (*frequently*).

The SLPI is grouped into five sections: Model the Way (Model), Inspire a Shared Vision (Inspire), Challenge the Process (Challenge), Enable Others to Act (Enable), and Encourage the Heart (Encourage) (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Each section of the SLPI contained six question items.

With permission from the survey authors, the SLPI was reproduced using an online survey maker, provided by the host institution. Two questions were added to the initial instrument for

demographic purposes. These questions asked participants to identify the organization with which they were affiliated and which council governs their respective organization.

Validity and Reliability
Early studies using the SLPI have reported internal reliability scores for all sections of $\alpha = .66$ (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). A large number of empirical studies have been conducted using the SLPI with a variety of different constituencies (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). The instrument showed a consistent relationship with various measures of effectiveness (Posner, 2004). With the exception of the addition of two questions used to separate participants into their respective governing councils, no changes were made to the SLPI.

Data Collection & Analysis
Upon approval from the study site's Institutional Review Board, a protocol e-mail was sent to all chapter presidents with instructions to forward the e-mail to their chapter membership. Once the protocol letter was forwarded to the members of each participating chapter, participants were instructed to click on a web link that brought them to a page containing the SLPI. Participants were asked to complete each item and submit the survey electronically. A time limit of three weeks was set for the data collection process. Once the timeframe expired, the online surveys were closed.

Once all data were collected, the data were sorted and input into the SLPI Scoring Software. After data were sorted, individual scores of each scale were calculated for each participant. After the individual scores were tabulated, the data were analyzed to answer the research questions developed for this study.

The first research question examined the leadership practices of the entire group of respondents and of each individual governing council. To answer this question, the means and standard deviations of the five scales of the SLPI were calculated for all participants and separated into each respective council. These statistics were used to describe the leadership practices of students affiliated with fraternities and sororities and by the members of the four different governing councils.

To answer the second research question, the means and standard deviations for each scale of the SLPI of the four governing councils were compared. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare the means of the four governing councils for each scale of the instrument. For all analyses, a significance probability of .05 was used. If significant differences were found, the Tukey post hoc test was used to determine which groups had significantly different mean scores.

Results
Three hundred members of the fraternity/sorority community at the study site completed an online version of the SLPI. The study yielded a response rate of 32.50%. A participant's score for each section was found by calculating the sum of the six questions within each section (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Depending on those scores, participants then determined in which areas of leadership practices they scored highest and lowest (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

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Leadership practices of governing councils. The first research question sought to identify the overall leadership practices of the participants and the leadership practices of members of each respective governing council. The means and standard deviations of the SLPI for all respondents were calculated and are shown in Table 1. These statistics give insight into the overall leadership practice categories for the respondents, as measured by the SLPI. From the 300 respondents who completed the SLPI, the mean scores were 22.66 for Model, 22.24 for Inspire, 21.62 for Challenge, 23.89 for Enable, and 23.17 for Encourage.

Table 1
Subscale Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Results by Governing Council

Leadership Practices	Mean	SD	df	F	p
Model the Way (Model)	22.66	3.07	3	0.13	0.94
IFC	22.67	3.26			
NPC	22.72	2.79			
NPHC	22.10	3.93			
UCFS	22.59	2.58			
Inspire a Shared Vision (Inspire)	22.24	3.74	3	0.29	0.83
IFC	22.22	3.79			
NPC	22.11	3.67			
NPHC	22.70	3.65			
UCFS	22.94	3.94			
Challenge the Process (Challenge)	21.62	3.50	3	0.72	0.54
IFC	21.70	3.50			
NPC	21.36	3.33			
NPHC	21.70	5.10			
UCFS	22.47	3.54			
Enable Others to Act (Enable)	23.89	2.64	3	2.75	0.04*
IFC	23.55	2.61			
NPC	24.13	2.60			
NPHC	25.10	2.23			
UCFS	24.88	2.93			
Encourage the Heart (Encourage)	23.17	3.61	3	0.56	0.64
IFC	23.01	3.55			
NPC	23.20	3.85			
NPHC	23.30	3.80			
UCFS	24.35	2.32			

*$p < 0.05$

Additionally, the first research question asked about the leadership practices for members from each of the four governing councils. Table 1 also shows the means and standard deviations of the five SLPI sections for the respondents of each of the four governing councils. The statistics displayed in Table 1 provide insight into the leadership practices in which each respective governing council either excels or is deficient.

Differences in leadership practices among governing councils. The second research question sought to identify the differences among the four governing councils in leadership practices,

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based on the SLPI. Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, which compared the mean scores of the five sections of the SLPI for the four governing councils. A probability of 0.05 was used to determine if differences in mean scores were significant.

A significant difference was found in one section: Enable Others to Act ($p=0.04$). To determine the significance of the difference in this section, a Tukey post hoc test was conducted. Comparing the means of each council individually, no significant differences were found in the Enable section of the SLPI between the four governing councils.

An additional ANOVA test was run comparing the mean scores of the 30 individual items of the SLPI for the four respective governing councils, using a probability of 0.05 to determine significant differences among mean scores. Once again, a probability of 0.05 was used to determine significant differences in mean scores. Table 2 shows the specific results of this test, where significant differences were found in 4 of 30 items. Two items were included in the Enable section: (Q4) I foster cooperative rather than competitive relationships among people I work with, and (Q14) I treat others with respect and dignity. The other two items were part of the Encourage section: (Q15) I give people in our organization support and express appreciation for their contributions, and (Q20) I make it a point to publicly recognize people who show commitment to our values.

Table 2
Individual Item Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Results by Governing Council

SLPI Questions (per section)	Mean	SD	df	F	p
Enable					
Q4) Foster cooperation	3.99	0.89	3	3.72	0.01*
IFC	3.85	0.95			
NPC	4.14	0.78			
NPHC	3.90	0.57			
UCFS	4.41	0.80			
Q14) Dignity and respect	4.61	0.62	3	3.24	0.02*
IFC	4.52	0.68			
NPC	4.73	0.50			
NPHC	4.80	0.42			
UCFS	4.71	0.59			
Encourage					
Q15) Give support	4.23	0.75	3	3.69	0.01*
IFC	4.15	0.71			
NPC	4.26	0.80			
NPHC	4.30	0.82			
UCFS	4.76	0.44			
Q20) Public recognition	3.46	1.06	3	2.96	0.03*
IFC	3.52	1.01			
NPC	3.29	1.16			
NPHC	3.40	0.97			
UCFS	4.06	0.75			

*$p < 0.05$

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An additional Tukey post hoc test was conducted to determine the exact location of the significant differences. Table 3 shows the results of this test on the 4 items that were shown to have significant differences. Items 4 and 14 showed significant differences between IFC and NPC. Significant differences between IFC and UCFS and between NPC and UCFS were found for item number 15. Finally, item 20 also had a significant difference ($p=0.03$) between NPC and UCFS.

Table 3
Tukey HSD Comparison of Governing Councils for Items 4, 14, 15, & 20

Governing Council (I)	Governing Council (II)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		p
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Q4) I foster cooperative rather than competitive relationships among people I work with.						
IFC	NPC	-0.28	0.11	-0.56	0.00	0.05*
Q14) I treat others with dignity and respect						
IFC	NPC	-0.22	0.08	-0.41	-0.02	0.02*
Q15) I give people in our organization support and express appreciation for their contributions.						
IFC	UCFS	-0.61	0.19	-1.10	-0.13	0.01*
NPC	UCFS	-0.51	0.19	-1.00	-0.01	0.05*
Q20) I make it a point to publicly recognize people who show commitment to our values.						
NPC	UCFS	-0.77	0.28	-1.48	-0.06	0.03*

*$p < 0.05$

Discussion

The mean scores for the five sections of the SLPI and the individual responses for all 30 items for the entire sample group and for each respective governing council were examined, to determine the leadership practices of the fraternity and sorority members at the study site and those same practices as governing council members. Based on those mean scores, it could be determined that there was no one category of leadership practices that respondents or members of the four governing councils demonstrated more than any other. Additionally, participants can use this data to make a more conscious effort to improve in their lowest scoring areas.

These findings are consistent with prior research, where no significant differences between types of fraternal organizations exist (Snyder, 1992; Williams, 2002). In other words, as organizations consisting of a wide variety of individual members contributing to the whole, each type of leadership practice can be addressed. Fraternities and sororities vary from chapter to chapter, in addition to their respective governing council. It is also possible that, due to individual differences between chapters, differences in the specific leadership practice aspects may exist.

Practical experience working with members of fraternities and sororities suggested that IFC and NPC chapters tend to focus more on the social aspect of membership where NPHC and UCFS chapters focus more on community service (personal communication, Preston, J., 2003). We have seen that there are no significant differences between the governing councils and the categories of leadership practices. This is consistent with previous research that found no

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significant differences between fraternal organizations whose membership differed by gender or ethnicity (Snyder 1992; Williams 2002). However, we were able to see significant differences when looking at specific items on the SLPI.

Fostering Cooperative Relationships
NPC respondents scored significantly higher in fostering cooperative rather than competitive relationships among people with whom they worked. Essentially, these results indicate that IFC respondents are more likely to compete with each other than NPC respondents who tend to collaborate. From a practical standpoint, this can be seen through the different styles of the new member recruitment process. NPC chapters usually have a coordinated program that requires collaboration between all chapters. IFC chapters usually have a more independent program and organizations directly compete for new members.

Additionally, the differences between IFC and NPC may be attributed to differences in gender, considering the other councils (NPHC and UCFS) consist of both male and female chapters. Adams & Keim (2000) reported that female affiliated members scored higher than their male counterparts on the SLPI.

Respect and Dignity
As the results have shown, NPC respondents tended to treat others with dignity and respect more frequently than respondents of the IFC chapters. It is possible that the significant difference found can be related to the significant difference from the item addressing cooperative relationships. More than their fraternity counterparts, sorority members tend to collaborate rather than compete. It makes sense that to maintain a high level of collaboration and a low level of competition within their chapters, sorority members would treat their fellow sisters with respect and dignity.

The first two items discussed show significant differences between two councils that differ in regards to gender of the respective organizations. Specifically, the female respondents (NPC) scored significantly higher than their male counterparts (IFC). This supports prior research that sorority women score higher on the SLPI than fraternity men (Adams & Keim, 2000). Results do not completely hold true to the results found by Adams & Keim (2000). Based on the results of the respondents from the site of study, significant differences were only found in 2 of 30 items of the SLPI.

Support and Appreciation
In regards to showing support and appreciation, respondents of UCFS chapters tended to do this more frequently than both their IFC and NPC counterparts. This could be due to the size and nature of the respective organizations. Chapters in IFC and NPC tend to be larger than the UCFS organizations, especially at the site of the study. Within a smaller organization, it may be easier for chapter members to give support and express appreciation to a larger percentage of their chapter.

This information would be of great insight for IFC and NPC chapters in assessing their current practices, specifically with support and appreciation. Making positive strides, ensuring that

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chapter members feel supported and appreciated could have an impact with retention, recruitment, and productivity.

Recognition of Commitment
Finally, a significant difference was found with recognition of commitment between the NPC and UCFS respondents. UCFS respondents were more likely to make it a point to publicly recognize people who show commitment to their values. Much like the previously mentioned item, this could be attributed to the difference in sizes of the respective chapters within each council.

Using the information from this study, NPC chapters can identify areas of concern and work to address them, publically recognizing those members who show commitment to core values and to convey the importance of commitment to those chapter members who struggle to do so.

Limitations
This study had limitations in addition to the concerns observed throughout the research process previously discussed. The SLPI has two parts: a self-test and an observer-test. This study used only the self-test, which may have influenced the results of the study. Perhaps future research could use both the self-test and the observer-test and may find significant differences of leadership practices among the governing councils.

The sample was another limitation to this study. A convenience sample was used with this study. Studies that use convenience sampling cannot generalize their findings to the entire population being studied. Future studies could make use of random sampling, which will allow for the generalization of results and findings.

Future Research
This study sought to compare the overall leadership practices of the four governing councils by surveying all members of the fraternities and sororities at the host institution. It would be interesting to see if there are differences in leadership practices between established chapter leaders (presidents, executive boards) and members that have not held a major leadership position.

Results of this study found that respondents of the fraternity/sorority community at the study site scored moderately on all sections of the SLPI. Future research could compare the differences in leadership practices of members of the fraternity/sorority community and a variety of other student populations. These populations include but are not limited to academic fraternities and sororities, first-year students, student government, resident advisors, etc. A future study could also identify the leadership practices of students who are participating in the new member or intake process. Those results could be used to compare leadership practices between new members and current members or used longitudinally to compare leadership practices of new members at the time of joining to graduation to identify how leadership practices change over time.

Implications for Practice

This study provided some implications for practice. Affiliated members of the fraternity and sorority community at the host institution scored only moderately on all sections of the SLPI. Staff members from the institution's Office of Fraternity & Sorority Life and chapter advisors could use these results as an initiative to develop and implement leadership development workshops geared to all members.

Additionally, the results of this study could be used by inter/national officers for fraternities and sororities to better understand the leadership capabilities of the individual fraternity and sorority chapters and members. By having an understanding of the leadership practices of its members, inter/national organizations could identify strengths and weaknesses and find ways to improve the overall experience of their members.

Kouzes & Posner (2006) stated that leadership, like any other skill, can be improved with feedback, practice, and good coaching. College campuses provide countless opportunities for students to improve leadership skills, for example student government, resident advisors, and peer educators (Astin & Astin, 2000). Fraternity and sorority chapter leaders must encourage their members to take advantage of these opportunities for personal development.

Conclusion

The implications of the results provide evidence that individual members of fraternity and sorority chapters all have different styles of leadership. Specific leadership practices may differ based on an individuals' personal values. In any given chapter or council, there will be individuals who gravitate towards certain leadership practices and individuals who utilize others. Therefore, one can conclude that these differences in leadership practices among chapter members contribute to the results of this study.

Results of this study indicated that there are no significant differences in leadership practices among the four governing councils at the host institution. This is consistent with past research that found that leadership practices were consistent across organizations whose membership differed by gender and ethnicity (Snyder 1992; Williams 2002).

Upon review of individual items of the SLPI, it was found that respondents from NPC chapters scored significantly higher than IFC chapters on two items from the Enable section. The findings show some consistency with prior research indicating that sorority women score higher on the SLPI than fraternity men on the SLPI (Adams & Keim, 2000). Additionally, it was found that UCFS respondents scored significantly higher on specific items in the Encourage section of the SLPI than members of IFC (item 15) and NPC (items 15 & 20).

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