**Program Evaluation: Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy**

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**Executive Summary**

A key component of the college experience for most students includes participation in a student organization, that stretches and grows their developing skills. These student groups provide individuals with tangible leadership and organizational skills for them to take into their young careers. The fraternity sorority life experience is one of the many opportunities that provides this to students. To assist students in growing these skills, universities will offer leadership programing that discusses the various challenges that one can face within a student organization. This provides students with the ability to connect with others and conjure new solutions to current issues that student organizations face. Through the Center for Fraternal Values and Leadership at West Virginia University, the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy is hosted to provide this opportunity for students. This is an 8-week experiential and voluntary learning program designed to equip new and current fraternity sorority life leaders with the hard and soft skills to improve their chapter and community. This evaluation was conducted to ensure that students are gaining the necessary skills and knowledge due to their participation. To assess this program, a mixed methods study was created utilizing a pre and post assessment, and interviews of current and former students. The pre assessment consisted of six Likert scale questions asking students to gauge their confidence in their: leadership skills, ability to address hazing, ability to address alcohol misuse, ability to address bullying, ability to address sexual harassment, and ability to create positive change. Additional questions were asked in the pre assessment regarding motivation for participation. After the academy had concluded, a post assessment was administered to gauge the confidence increase using the same Likert scale questions. Additional questions were asked regarding student knowledge gain and if there was any information they wish they learned. Finally, interviews were conducted with three current students and one previous student to gain additional knowledge. The previous student had completed the academy in a previous semester. The interview questions asked students about their motivation to participate, skills gained, if the objectives align with the fraternity sorority life community, if the academy is effective in addressing the needs of the community and comparing this academy to other leadership-based programs. Through the collected data we saw roughly a one-point increase in confidence in each area. Additionally, students felt the academy appropriately reflected the needs of the fraternity sorority life community, and that it was effective in addressing these needs. Overall, students reported improved confidence and knowledge gain due to their participation in the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy. Recommendations for future academies would be to find ways to increase participation with the total number of students, and more diversity in which fraternity sorority life communities participate.

**Introduction**

Across the nation undergraduate enrolled students look for on-campus organizations that will provide them with new challenges that will help them grow as young adults. Students will find these leadership opportunities throughout their collegiate experience but a popular way to gain this is through fraternity sorority life. Students will be duly elected or appointed to various positions, and their action, or inaction will impact their organization and campus community. To assist these students in appropriate decision-making, universities will provide programming to educate students on policies, resources, and to improve their skills. Universities providing this continued education across various departments display the importance of this need. Programs like the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy, hosted by the West Virginia University Center for Fraternal Values and Leadership is one of these programs. Through this, an evaluation of this program is conducted and recommendations for future iterations are provided.

**Research Background**

Throughout the history of higher education, fraternity and sorority life organizations have existed to provide added value to student’s experiences. Originally developed as organizations for students to discuss literature and current events outside of a rigid university structure (Sasso, Biddix and Miranda, 2020), they have continued to develop to meet the needs of current students. The contemporary fraternity sorority experience consists of many aspects such as leadership, philanthropic and service endeavors, campus involvement and social life. As fraternities and sororities have evolved throughout the centuries, they have most recently continued to engage in risky behavior. These actions have led to students and members being injured or killed due to a lack of intervention by those involved. One of these cases occurred on West Virginia Universities campus with the death of Nolan Burch in 2014. Organizations and universities internationally have responded by empowering volunteers or hiring new staff members to educate, lead and support students towards a safe and beneficial experience. With this, programming and education are created to motivate students to take appropriate action, abide by university and organizational policy, and to generate student led change within their community.

To assist in the identification of the problem, these provided resources will detail some of the issues regularly noted in college aged students and fraternity sorority life. Fraternity and sorority life often acts as a microcosm of the student population, students will see similar actions across student organizations independent of their classification. The *West Virginia University Annual Security Fire and Safety Report* (2023) details the available Clery Act statistics on crimes reported for the Morgantown Campus. We see high rates of liquor law and drug law violations that have resulted in either an arrest or referral. Students can be expected to experience these directly or indirectly during their time, therefore equipping them with the knowledge of university policy and how to handle these situations will be vital. Additional data provided by the Piazza Center details conduct violations for fraternities in their National Scorecard. This is a partial dataset which only details the number of conduct cases for historically white fraternities. Through this we see that across 72 reporting universities and 579 chapters, 165 of them faced some form of conduct violation, equaling 28.5% (Piazza Center, 2019). While conduct violations are not specified, they can include recruitment, alcohol, drug, or hazing related infractions. Additionally, no information is provided regarding the number of violations, just the number of organizations with at least one violation. With this high rate of conduct cases, student leaders must be better equipped to lead their organizations to addressing the high-risk nature that can occur with late adolescents.

Additional perspective can be provided through Erik Erikson’s developmental stages and how it aligns with many of the risky behaviors that college fraternity and sorority life students face. Specifically, during this developmental stage individuals can struggle with personal identity and changes in morality. For personal identity, the late adolescent stage is an opportunity for someone to define or redefine themselves. Within this stage individuals consider the past, present and future identity but also how their connections impact their trajectory (Newman & Newman, 2018, p. 399). When students find an organization of like-minded individuals to join in their college career, these perspectives become integral to a student developing their identity. The morals and values of this group impact the individual and their future identity and actions. With morality, individuals within this stage begin to move from their internalized morality, their code developed through the perspectives of their parents, and start to develop their own moral compass (Newman & Newman, 2018, p. 388). This can lead to students trying drugs, alcohol, or sex which they may not have had access to before. Students can begin to push the boundaries of what they originally thought was acceptable and consider new perspectives or outcomes of their actions. With these aspects to consider, it is important that additional structure is provided to students at this integral time or identity and moral development.

**Methodologies**

This assessment will be a mixed methods program evaluation, in which a pre and post assessment will be used followed by interviews of current and former students. The pretest was conducted during the first session in which students were asked to grade their confidence on a scale of 1 – 10 in various skills. The posttest will ask students to gauge their confidence in the same areas and the change in these scores will be calculated. The interviews will be with current and former academy participants to gain additional qualitative data regarding the knowledge and skills gained.

To select the interview participants, the first consideration was students’ participation during their academy sessions. Attendance has been tracked during each academy week to see which students are appearing at each session. To accurately measure impact, contacting students who were regular participants will allow the interview to gauge skills gained. A student who chose to miss multiple academy sessions will struggle to identify the skills they gained since they did not participate as much as others. The demographics of the respondents will be predominantly female. This is due to the participation that we see across each semester of the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy as it is heavily dominated by female students in Panhellenic Sororities or Professional Greek Council organizations. This will influence the overall reported data since the population of the academy is not completely reflective of the fraternity sorority life population. Additionally, this will affect the self-reported Likert scale scores. As an example, there is a possibility that female participants have received more education regarding sexual harassment and this knowledge will alter their confidence scores.

**Instruments**

The instruments utilized here are a pretest and posttest and four interviews with previous and current students. The Likert scale questions for the pretest include…

1. How confident are you in your leadership skills (Not Confident to Very Confident)?
2. How confident do you feel in your ability to address hazing within your organization/community (Not Confident to Very Confident)?
3. How confident do you feel in your ability to address alcohol misuse within your organization/community (Not Confident to Very Confident)?
4. How confident do you feel in your ability to address bullying within your organization/community (Not Confident to Very Confident)?
5. How confident do you feel in your ability to address sexual harassment in your organization/community (Not Confident to Very Confident)?
6. How confident do you feel in your ability to create positive change within your Greek Community (Not Confident to Very Confident)?

Additional questions within the pretest include…

1. What skills or knowledge are you looking to gain through participation in the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy?”

The same Likert scale questions are asked in the post assessment, along with questions like…

1. What skills/knowledge did you gain through participation in the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy?
2. What did you enjoy the most about the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy?
3. Is there any information/content you wish was a part of the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy?

The interview questions will ask students to provide their own perspectives on the information provided during the academy. These questions include…

1. What motivated you to participate in the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy?
2. What skills did you gain during your time in the Greek Leadership Academy?
   1. How have you utilized these skills in your chapter or elsewhere?
3. Do you believe the learning objectives/goals of the Greek Leadership Academy align with the needs of the community?
4. How effective is the Greek Leadership Academy in addressing the needs of the community?
5. Have you participated in other leadership programs? If yes, how does the Greek Leadership Academy compare (better or worse)?

With this additional information, students will be able to vocalize the skills gained and this information will be compared to the quantitative data provided. Ideally, students will be able to vocalize the confidence gained in the interviews which also reflects the gains from the Likert scales between pre and posttest.

**Results**

The pre-test was administered during the first session of the academy and was completed by fourteen participants. The post assessment was delivered via email and completed by nine students. The scores were averaged out across the respondents, and the increase/decrease will denote the academies effectiveness.

**Assessment data**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Pre-Assessment Averages (n=14) | Post-Assessment Averages (n=9) | Increase |
| Q1 | 7.14 | 9.00 | 1.86 |
| Q2 | 7.64 | 9.56 | 1.91 |
| Q3 | 7.79 | 9.44 | 1.66 |
| Q4 | 7.07 | 9.33 | 2.26 |
| Q5 | 8.64 | 9.44 | 0.80 |
| Q6 | 8.43 | 9.67 | 1.24 |

Through the quantitative data there is an increase in confidence over each identified area. While the sample size for the post assessment is small, the increase is validated through the interviews and student identified confidence gain. When interviewing participants, they noted gained confidence to take on new leadership roles or speak out to address issues they notice. Quotes like, “I feel like I've definitely been able to like point things out more. Might be like ohh that's not OK like there's a reason why we're doing this” and “I volunteered for more in my organization, I am co-chairing our biggest event with another brother” displays this confidence gain. Similarly, interviewees noted a gain in self-awareness that was beneficial. Students also noted additional value in the conversational style of the academy and how it creates community and opportunities for inter-organizational collaboration. It was mentioned in one interview that more people should participate in the academy, if more students were to participate there could be a larger network of motivated leaders working together.

The information regarding community needs will be utilized to shape future education either within the academy or through additional opportunities. Students agree that the various community needs include community cohesion, recruitment, and hazing prevention education. The additional information provided regarding motivation is instrumental in identifying students’ interest in this program and learning ways to reach future participants. Overall, the academy appears to be effective in improving confidence in students and accurate in reflecting the community needs.

**Recommendations**

Through this data, students have been able to denote the skill and knowledge gained through participation in the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy. Students have noted the increase in confidence in six different areas and have identified specific skill gain through quantitative data. Through the provided data the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy is successful in accomplishing its goal to provide soft and hard leadership skills to current and future fraternity and sorority life leaders. The data set gathered displays a small number of students, so future iterations of this evaluation would require more participants and respondents. This will increase the validity of the data, while it is to be believed that the respondents answered truthfully, more respondents would secure this claim. This is also a recommendation for the academy at large, to increase participation. By analyzing the number of participants and applicants the academy has each semester, there has been a slow decrease in applicants and thus participants. To be impactful to the largest population possible, identifying why participation has been decreasing should be found and remedied. Beyond this fact, students that did participate did enjoy and feel they gained knowledge due to their participation.

**Conclusion**

Through this evaluation, it has been displayed that students have been able to gain valuable knowledge due to their participation in the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy. While new methods need to be identified to reach a larger student population, the fact remains students are gaining valuable experience. Once a larger student population is reached, then there will be an impact on the leadership of these student organizations, as we continue to provide value, and mitigate risk amongst fraternity and sorority life members.

**References**

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**Appendix A**

Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy Program Evaluation Code Book

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| **Themes** | **Codes** | **Quotes** |
| Motivations  Questions used:  “What motivated you to participate in the NBGLA?” | Fraternity Sorority Life Improvement | “I feel like I have the need to like save the organization…” (Interview)  “…gain some more perspective in the like outside…and see how they're doing things to maybe bring some of their stuff in our organization to improve.” (Interview)  “…between like Greek life and it's kind of dying between like IIFC and IFC.” (Interview)  “I've seen bigger chapters…I feel like I have to help make it bigger again…But like a couple semesters ago, there were no pledges. So like, the organization was almost gone.” (Interview)  “I had known a bunch of people…who were in Greek life…I could kind of tell that they weren't really like…doing things that were not good for themselves… I felt like at least being more informed and knowing how to handle, things like that, I feel like it would make me like not only a better person, but I could help it within my own sorority.” (Interview) |
| Self-Improvement | “I'm freshmen and I'm looking to take on a leadership role in my fraternity.” (Interview)  “…because I've known girls that have, like, gone through some not so good things and I wanted to be able to like know how to handle that.” (Interview)  “I think growth and personal development skills will help me implement those tactics in my own life and my organization.” (Pre-Assessment) |
| Skills gained.  Questions used:  “What skills did you gain during your time in the Greek Leadership Academy?” | Confidence | “I feel like I've definitely been able to like point things out more. Might be like ohh that's not OK like there's a reason why we're doing this.” (Interview)  “I volunteered for more in my organization, I am co-chairing our biggest event was another brother.” (Interview) |
| Awareness/Understanding | “…self-awareness, and like, where I struggle as a leader and like where I can improve?” (Interview)  “I feel like I've definitely been able to like point things out more. Might be like ohh that's not OK like there's a reason why we're doing this.” (Interview)  “…learned about recruitment around campus and how downtown is very, let's say its own bubble…” (Interview) |
| Community Needs  Questions Used  “What skills or knowledge are you looking to gain through participation in the Nolan Burch Greek Leadership Academy?”  “Do you believe the learning objectives/goals of the NBGLA align with the needs of the community?”  “How effective is the NBGLA in addressing the needs of the community?” | Community Cohesion | “I feel like it's very split up. I feel like there's a lot of unaffiliated and affiliated and it's like, creating kind of like a barrier. And Greek life is not like very together.” (Interview)  “How to bridge the gap and break stigmas between councils” (Pre-Assessment) |
| Recruitment | “…when we learned about recruitment around campus and how downtown is very, let's say its own bubble, and how we can branch out to Evansdale and different parts of campus to gain more people.” (Interview)  “…Greek life and it's kind of dying between like IIFC and IFC.” (Interview)  “…to be accessible to every individual and how to create a more organized and inviting environment for potential new members.” (Pre-Assessment)  “…how to be a strong leader and be able to have my fraternity grow at increasing rates based off a solid reputation around campus.” (Pre-Assessment) |
| Hazing Prevention Education | “I also want to gain more knowledge on how to prevent these issues and minimize hazing.” (Pre-Assessment)  “I am looking to gain more of an insight into effective ways to prevent hazing” (Pre-Assessment)  “…an overall insight on how hazing affects Greek organizations and the initiatives we can take to make students feel safe when they make the decision to join Greek life.” (Pre-Assessment) |