Assessing the Persistence to Graduation of Students Joining Fraternities at Western Kentucky University

Charles Pride
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ASSESSING THE PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION OF STUDENTS JOINING FRATERNITIES AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Specialist in Education Degree

by

Charles L. Pride

December 1996
ASSESSING THE PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION OF STUDENTS JOINING FRATERNITIES AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

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ASSESSING THE PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION OF STUDENTS JOINING FRATERNITIES AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Charles L. Pride December 1996 43 pages

Directed by: Dr. Aaron Hughey, Dr. Stephen Schnacke, Dr. Fred Stickle
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In the study, I assessed the persistence of students who joined fraternities at Western Kentucky University. Also included is a comparison between them and the general student population. The study includes 1467 students who joined fraternities between the Fall 1986 to Spring 1991 semesters. A five-year time period was used as the benchmark for graduation from the institution. Factors that were explored included race, initiation status, year in school when pledging, and organizational affiliation.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to analyze the data. The results illustrated that students who join fraternities graduate at a higher percentage than the general student population. Black students who join fraternities graduate at a significantly higher percentage than black students who do not join. Pledge Year and Initiation Status proved to be significant factors.
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Introduction

Fraternities have been the focus of increasing scrutiny within the higher education community in recent years. Proponents of fraternity life state that the fraternity is a place to develop and grow as a person. Fraternities offer a chance to become a leader and to challenge oneself. Opponents paint a picture of brutal hazings, alcohol abuse, elitism, racism, and a nonintellectual environment. Media headlines are often less than flattering. The media highlights the negative image without exploring other aspects of fraternity life. For many years, the battle has raged between the opponents and proponents of fraternities.

Webster (1984) defines fraternity as “a body of people associated for a common interest or purpose and a chiefly social organization of male college students usually designated by Greek letters” (p.504). Thomas S. Smith defines fraternities as “organizations that crystallize their members and give them self-identity” (Robson, 1966). During this process, supportive personal ties form a group commitment (Longino & Kart, 1973). These definitions allude to the reality that a fraternity can have a powerful effect on its members and can be very influential in its members' lives.

The recent increase in fraternity membership offers powerful testimony that the fraternity experience allows students to make an active commitment to their college education. The fraternity experience generates opportunities for participants to develop interpersonal relationships, learn leadership skills, develop capacities for cooperative effort
through teamwork, stimulate a lively interchange of ideas, promote values consistent with
a democratic society and a learning community, and facilitate the development of a sense
of autonomy and personal identity. Fraternities have the potential to contribute
substantially to an institution's quest for educational excellence. The continuing goal for
fraternal organizations is to create and maintain residential communities of students drawn
together by common interests, common goals, shared values, participation, organization,
interdependence, and commitment. Members can gain strong feelings of identity, security,
and stimulation from these organizations (Schwartz & Bryan, 1983).

Because of the negative perception of Greek behavior in recent years, some
colleges including Amherst, Colby, Franklin and Marshall, Gustavus Adolphus, and
Williams Colleges have banned fraternities from their campuses (Schwartz & Bryan,
1983). In addition, other colleges, including Bowdoin College, Rutgers University, and
the University of Texas at Austin, are looking at radical reform measures (Malaney, 1990).
Fraternities must continually prove that they are a valuable asset to their respective
university communities. Even with the negative perceptions, fraternity life still attracts
new members. The challenge is to make membership an enhancing experience that will
counteract the negative perceptions.

Many public images associated with fraternities are not academically oriented.
Fraternities are often seen as engaging in alcohol and drug abuse, irresponsible and
negligent behavior, hazing, poor academic performance, destruction of property, racial
bigotry, sexual attacks, and disruption of residential neighborhoods. While making these
kinds of allegations against all fraternity members is unfair and inaccurate, the incidents
are frequent enough to maintain negative stereotypes in the mind of the public and to question whether fraternities promote the ideals of an academic community.

Robert D. Lynn (1958) of Pi Kappa Alpha national fraternity answers the question of why fraternities have developed on college campuses. He states that colleges were designed to train the mind but that students must develop physically, socially, morally, and spiritually while they are preparing for their vocations. The college curriculum leaves a vacuum. The fraternity system originally evolved to satisfy a social need (Robson, 1966).

Membership in a fraternity offers opportunities for involvement in a wide range of campus activities. Involvement in these types of activities can result in interactions that may both stimulate the learning process and enhance members' growth and development. Central to many student development theories is that increased involvement can have an effect on students' satisfaction with the overall college environment. Involvement reinforces a desire to continue academic pursuits, which, in turn, positively affect persistence (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Hunt & Rentz, 1994). Fraternities provide a chance to identify with something of worth, a sense of belonging, assistance during the transition period as a student comes to campus, standards following ideals and principles and guidelines of behavior, models of good citizenship, personal integrity, and respect for individual freedoms. Fraternities offer students vast opportunities, if they chose to take advantage of them.

The main mission of the university is to prepare its students to lead a productive life and be an asset to society. One symbol of this goal is graduating students from their program and the institution. This objective can be accomplished in many ways, and
fraternity life can play a major role in the lives of many students. Educators, parents, and the general public look to higher education to produce positive results. Fraternity life can help in achieving those results.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to explore the effect of fraternity membership on the persistence to graduation of students that join fraternal organizations. The study involves several factors that tend to influence fraternity members, including the year in school when they pledged, if they were initiated into their chosen organization, and if they graduated, transferred or did not graduate from the institution. The graduation rates of fraternity members were compared to the graduation rates of the general college population. Members of fraternities were grouped by organization and race. Gender was also a factor in that all fraternity members are men. A main tenet of the university is to have its students graduate. The study was an attempt to determine if fraternity membership helps or hinders this process. Participants in the study included students who pledged one of the thirteen social fraternities that were recognized at Western Kentucky University from Fall Semester 1986 through Spring Semester 1991.

Rationale for the Study

The concept of accountability has become a main focus in our society. Public universities are more accountable for their students than ever before. Accountability can be quantified in many ways. One way to quantify accountability of an institution of higher learning is to consider whether or not its students are graduating. One facet of college life is joining a fraternity. If fraternities are indeed a valuable asset to an institution, then they
should have a positive impact on students' potential to graduate. At the very least, fraternity members should exhibit a graduation rate comparable to nonmembers. Fraternities promote the advantages of membership during their recruitment process. One advantage promoted is that their members graduate. The results of this study will confirm or deny this statement.

Statement of the Problem

An assessment of persistence to graduation by students who join a fraternity is a measure to see if fraternity membership is a valuable asset to the university community. Studying the records of students who join fraternities and those who do not gives us a valid comparison. Factors included initiation status, year in school in which the student pledged, race, and organizational affiliation. This study represents a method whereby fraternity membership can be evaluated by an institution.

Research Hypotheses

The primary hypothesis tested during the study was as follows:

**Hypothesis**—Students who join social fraternities at Western Kentucky University graduate at a rate that is significantly higher than their counterparts who do not join social fraternities.

Conversely, the null hypothesis tested during the course of the study was as follows:

**Null Hypothesis**—Students who join social fraternities at Western Kentucky University do not graduate at a significantly higher rate than students who do not join a social fraternity.
Definition of Terms

**Pledge**—a person who attempts to gain membership in a social fraternity by going through an evaluation period by the organization.

**Member or Initiated Member**—a person who has completed his pledgeship and has been initiated by the organization into full membership.

**Pledge Year**—the year in school that a person pledges a fraternity.

**Depledge**—a person who is not initiated into membership, after pledging. There are two categories of depledging. The first is voluntary, which means that the student quits upon their own accord. The second is involuntary, which means depledging because the pledge did not achieve the minimum grade point average to be initiated or the fraternity terminated the pledges membership in the organization.

**Graduate**—a person who has completed his degree within five years of initial enrollment at the university.

**Non-Graduate**—a person who has not graduated from the institution within five years of initial enrollment.

**Transfer**—a person who leaves the institution to attend another institution before graduating.

**Other**—a person who was physically unable to finish his college degree.

**Independent**—a person who did not pledge a fraternity.

**NPHC (National PanHellenic Council) fraternities**—historically black fraternities.
Review of the Literature

History

In 1776, Phi Beta Kappa became the first American society bearing a Greek-letter name. It was founded December 5, 1776, at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. Phi Beta Kappa had all the characteristics of the present-day fraternity: The charm and mystery of secrecy, a ritual, oaths of fidelity, a grip, a motto, a badge for external display, a background of high idealism, a strong tie of friendship and comradeship, an urge for sharing its values through nationwide expansion. The young men found the atmosphere of the Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern conducive to a buoyant camaraderie. Phi Beta Kappa and the societies that copied it became scholarly honor societies. Phi Beta Kappa became a strictly academic society a few years after its inception (Owen, 1991).

In 1825, the Kappa Alpha Society was formed at Union College in New York. Two other groups formed shortly thereafter, creating the "Union Triad." The new societies bore a close resemblance to Phi Beta Kappa. The new societies were met with opposition by the faculty but were secretly popular with students. This ideal became the pattern for the American fraternity system. College students originated secret societies to rebel against the autocratic and religiously oriented faculties (Longino & Kart, 1973).

In 1833, Alpha Delta Phi became the first fraternity to establish a chapter west of the Alleghenies with the organization of its group at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, then
the most distinguished seat of learning in the Middle West. Opposition to Alpha Delta Phi resulted in the founding of Beta Theta Pi at Miami in 1839. Beta Theta Pi, Phi Delta Theta, and Sigma Chi are generally known as the "Miami Triad." Just as the Union Triad was instrumental in leading the way to the formation of the fraternity system, so in the following generation the Miami Triad blazed the trail for the development of the truly national fraternity. From the beginning each of these great fraternities envisioned a brotherhood that, embracing membership drawn from every part of the nation, should be democratic and typically American. Each of them has established chapters in more than a hundred colleges. Theirs was the mission of developing the processes of organization and administration that have been adopted and adapted by most fraternities, which are more than sectional (Baird, 1991).

While fraternities have much in common, they exhibit many and marked differences. Age and tradition have stamped some of them as conservative and given to others an ingrained democratic character. Some have shown decided preference for particular types of institutions. A few groups have been traditionally set apart on a basis of religious affiliations. Some are sectional. Kappa Alpha Order prides itself on being Southern. Alpha Delta Phi, Psi Upsilon, Theta Delta Chi, Alpha Chi Rho, and others are generally considered eastern, although they do have outposts in other sections of the country. Delta Upsilon is a nonsecret fraternity. During the War Between the States, the Constantine chapter of Sigma Chi was founded in the Confederate Army—the only chapter of its kind. Chi Phi was the first fraternity to establish a chapter outside the United States and Canada. Zeta Psi was the first fraternity to enter Canada. Phi Delta Theta was the
first to cross the Mississippi (Baird, 1991).

The fraternity movement survived the Civil War. At the war’s end, many fraternities appeared, especially ones created in the South, at institutions made prominent by their military character. Fraternities continued to grow and expand at a leisurely rate until the 1900s (Owen, 1991).

Since 1900, the development of fraternities has been so rapid that the twentieth century organizations outnumber those established in the nineteenth century. Older fraternities have expanded to numerous campuses due to the great growth of education institutions and the tremendous increase in the number of students. World War I, the depression of the 1930s, and World War II were periods of crisis that fraternities survived although these events inevitably changed them. It has been estimated that 325,000 fraternity men and women served in World War II. At the close of World War II, the fraternity system received a great influx of new members. The period between the end of World War II and the 1960s saw unprecedented expansion in fraternity membership. During this time, more campuses opened to national fraternities, more chapters were installed, more members were initiated, more chapter houses were built, and more foundations and endowment funds were established than at any time before or since (Owen, 1991).

The first fraternities have been compared to the student power advocates of the 1960s. Both groups were ideologically oriented. With the introduction of student governments, the new student press, and the changing of students attitudes, social fraternities also began to change. Fraternities lost much of their original ideological
orientation, but not their secrecy and selectivity (Longino & Kart, 1973).

The fraternity movement faced the war in Vietnam, and student unrest turned many college students away from the established practices of the past. Many perceived the Greek world as closely tied to a conservative lifestyle (Schwartz & Bryan, 1983). Fraternities became a favorite target of student dissidents. A time of upheaval in colleges and universities was reflected in low numbers of students joining Greek organizations during the 1960s. Many campuses found their Greek systems suffering and dying out (Owen, 1991).

The fraternity system reached its low point in 1973. Statistics reflected a substantial drop in growth and membership. After 1973, membership in fraternities again rose and has continued to grow since that time. Fraternities have more than 5,238 chapters and 418 colonies at more than 800 colleges and universities. There are more men in American college fraternities now than at any other time in their existence. The total number of fraternity members on campus has increased by 178% since 1973. There are 4.5 million initiated members of fraternities including more than 400,000 collegians on campuses throughout Canada and the United States (Baird, 1991). Members of Greek organizations make up a large percentage of the student body on some campuses.

Many individual fraternities operate as the same type of organization. These organizations range from large to small and older to younger. They share many of the same beliefs. Two international fraternities include Phi Delta Theta, founded 1848, and Lambda Chi Alpha, founded 1909. Each has an organization that encompasses about 200 undergraduate chapters and 100 alumni clubs. Phi Delta Theta operates its headquarters
from Oxford, Ohio. Lambda Chi Alpha is located in Indianapolis, Indiana. These organizations’ day-to-day operations are run by a professional staff guided by a volunteer board. The organization as a whole meets biennially at their conventions to make the policy and constitutional decisions. Most national/international fraternities operate under this or a similar model.

In 1992, the National PanHellenic Council (NPHC) passed a requirement that all NPHC organizations could not pledge a student until they were at least a second semester freshman. The NPHC governs the major historically black fraternities and sororities. This move was an attempt by these organizations to put academics before Greek life.

Western Kentucky University Greek History

The history of fraternities at Western Kentucky University (WKU) is relatively short. One of the biggest changes in student life of the 1960s was the introduction of social fraternities and sororities. Western's first president, Henry Hardin Cherry, had a natural dislike of fraternities and had banned Greek organizations. This ban continued until August 23, 1961, when the Board of Regents approved a committee recommendation to establish national social fraternities and sororities. The Board of Regents encouraged the establishment of national affiliations (Harrison, 1987).

By the spring of 1964, eight local fraternities had received permission to affiliate with national organizations and others soon followed. On February 5, 1965, Phi Kappa Alpha local fraternity became Kappa Sigma fraternity, the first to be fully recognized by both the national fraternity and the university. On February 6, 1965, Lambda Sigma Epsilon became Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity. On March 15, 1965 Phi Sigma Tau became

Each of the fraternities had a distinct personality which has changed over time. Fraternities grew rapidly during the first few years. The influence of the fraternity system can not be overlooked. With the guidance of the Interfraternity Council, the fraternities became a driving force on the Western Kentucky University campus. Each year, an average of 300 students affiliate with fraternities. Fraternity members have held numerous leadership positions, on the Student Government and on the Student Programming Board. Several fraternity chapters have been recognized by their national fraternity as outstanding chapters. The chapters are recognized on the basis of their chapter programming, new member programming, alumni programming and community service as well as other areas. During 1993-94, WKU fraternities performed 15,217.5 service hours and raised more than $134,000 for various organizations (Pride, 1994).

**Student Involvement**

Fraternities promote student involvement. Considerable research has been conducted concerning student involvement and its influence on the persistence toward
graduation. A variety of concepts have been used to investigate persistence—including graduation rates, educational attainment, attrition, and school holding power. Several researchers have investigated the role of student involvement from matriculation to graduation (Astin, 1975, 1977; Boyer, 1987; Chickering, 1969, 1993; Feldman & Newcomb, 1973).

The retention of students in higher education continues to concern college administrators. More than 40% of all college entrants leave higher education without earning a degree, 75% of these students drop out after the first two years of college, and an institution can expect that 56% of a typical entering class will not graduate from that college (Tinto, 1987). The transition to college is marked by complex challenges in emotional, social, and academic adjustment.

Chickering (1969) has described in some detail the developmental directions of young adults in college. He uses "vectors" that describe what most traditional students tend to experience while in college:

1. Achieving Competence: The three elements of this point are intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal. The key element is a sense of competence, or the confidence to achieve.

2. Managing Emotions: Self-control is the key issue. It is being able to control the emotions of aggression and sexual impulses.

3. Becoming Autonomous: One being able to cope without help and continued reassurance.

4. Establishing Identity: Discovering who one is and the kind of experiences that
one enjoys.

5. Freeing Interpersonal Relationships: Relationships lead to a greater tolerance for others, bring with it stronger feelings of trust, independence, and individuality.

6. Clarifying Purposes: This process requires formulating plans and priorities that integrate avocational and recreational interests, vocational plans, and lifestyle considerations. With such integration, life flows with meaning and direction.

7. Developing Integrity: Establishing a behavior pattern that is consistent with the values that one has chosen for oneself.

Within the last two decades, many student affairs professionals have applied Chickering's theory to practice. They have geared a large component of student activities and organizations toward the key points of Chickering's Theory.

The belief that involvement increases positive influences has also gained popularity in the higher education arena. The report of the NIE Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in the American Higher Education (1984) cited involvement as the most important condition for improving undergraduate education. The report listed two axioms of student involvement. The first one is that the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality of student involvement in the program. The second axiom is that the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement in learning (Webb, 1987).

Astin (1984) has outlined a developmental theory for higher education which
corresponds to the NIE Study. Astin defines student involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. A highly involved student would be one who devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Astin explains that the student involvement theory has five basic elements:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. Students may generalize the objects (the student experience) or focus specifically on an individual object (preparing for a chemistry exam).

2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of some student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively/ (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively/ (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any education program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in the program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practices to increase student involvement.

Astin's theory encourages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student does. It explores how to motivate the student and energy that the student devotes to the process (Astin, 1984).

Astin (1975) also identified factors in the college environment that effect student persistence in college. He indicated that every positive factor was likely to increase student involvement and every negative factor was likely to reduce involvement. This research along with others (Astin, 1977; Pace, 1984) tends to support the notion that student involvement has a positive relationship with student retention, student satisfaction, and student perceptions of the college experience. In short, Astin's research has provided evidence that student organizations and related student activities can make significant contributions to student's development. Moreover, Pace (1984) suggested that the most important item for development and education is not where a student goes to college, but what the student does once he/she gets there.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1981) noted that peer relationships and extracurricular involvement may expose students to a social network of other achievement-oriented peers thereby generating and reinforcing high aspirations and goals. It may also facilitate the realization of such aspirations and goals by allowing students to acquire the personal resources, i.e., interpersonal skills, self-confidence and specialized knowledge, that permits such aspirations and goals to be realized.

Participation or involvement in a number of areas, such as living in residence halls
and extracurricular activities, has been found to affect students and their educational experiences. Out of class activities, especially participation in student organizations, have been assumed to contribute significantly to the development of the "whole student" and are considered an "integral part" of the education process (Winston & Massaro, 1987). Several campus factors associated with student persistence toward graduation include receiving effective academic and career advising, participating in campus activities, making the proper institutional fit for the student, faculty and staff interaction and making progress toward a goal (Webb, 1987; Chickering, 1969).

Research has shown that student organizations and related student activities can make significant contributions to some student’s development. Extra-curricula participation encourages students to connect with their institution in reflecting a degree of involvement that maximizes educational impact and conditions associated with persistence. Students seemed to have connected with their university in a special way. The connections may be evident in the degree and breadth of involvement. It has been found that the most influential variable for college achievement is the effort a student invests in opportunities for learning and development in the college setting (Abrahamowicz, 1988).

Boyer (1987) believes that a college or university is a place where the curricular and co-curricular have a unique relationship. At a time when social bonds are tenuous, students try to discover the reality of their dependency on each other. They must understand what it means to share and sustain traditions. Thus enters the idea of building communities whether it is residence halls, student organizations, or fraternities.
Organizations are a component in developing communities which develops students.

The importance of social integration in college persistence can be emphasized. Social integration can be defined to include peer friendships, interaction with faculty and staff, and involvement with institutional facilities and activities. Assimilation is critical in combating withdrawal. Two factors are critical in the assimilation process. They are satisfaction with the college experience and commitment to the social system. Not only do student organizations and related activities provide educational and developmental benefits generally unattainable in the classroom, they can also be a factor in enhancing retention (Abrahamowicz, 1988). The institutions that can provide potentially satisfying social environments for all students have increased their students' chances of graduating.

Students without reasons need direction in pursuing an educational plan. They need to have cause, purpose, commitment, and goals to succeed in college life. Student activities and organizations provide many reasons for students to be involved and persist in their collegiate efforts (Wessell, Engle, & Smidchens, 1978).

Fraternity Members' Characteristics

Fraternity life is one avenue for student involvement. There have been several studies over the years dealing with fraternities, characteristics of members, effects on moral development, and values and effects on academic success. These studies provide a conflicting picture of the benefits or faults of fraternity life. For example, fraternity members tend to come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds than do independent students (Dollar, 1966; Longino & Kart, 1973; Miller, 1973; Shaffer, 1983). The student's background could lead to more opportunities for fraternity members and better
preparation for the rigors of college life. Fraternity members also tend to be more conservative than independents (Longino & Kart, 1973; Miller, 1973; Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, & Zettle, 1977; Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder, & Carney, 1986).

Members of fraternities are less concerned, involved, or interested in social injustices (Baier & Whipple, 1990; Longino & Kart, 1973; Miller, 1973, Wilder et al. 1977; Wilder, et al. 1986). It has been shown that fraternity members are more dependent on peer relationships (Baier & Whipple, 1990; Hughes & Winston, 1987; Wilder, et al. 1977, Wilder, et al. 1986). Fraternity members are more prejudiced (Longino & Kart, 1973) and ethnocentric (Astin, 1972; Longino & Kart, 1973). They appear less interested in cultural activities (Miller, 1973; Wilder, et al. 1977). Marlowe and Auvenshine (1982) found that fraternity members are more likely to have superficial interpersonal relationships, attitudes of social elitism, and promote excessive alcohol consumption. These characteristics do not appear to develop members for the mission of academe or push one toward the goal of graduation.

Research has also demonstrated other characteristics of fraternity membership. Members are more involved in extracurricular activities (Baier & Whipple, 1990; Longino & Kart, 1973; Miller, 1973). Fraternity members have more self-confidence (Longino & Kart, 1973). They are more sociable (Baier & Whipple, 1990; Longino & Kart, 1973), more assertive (Astin, 1972; Dollar, 1966; Longino & Kart, 1973), and develop more leadership skills (Astin, 1977; Dollar, 1966). They have greater feelings of security and belonging than nonmembers (Astin 1975, 1977). They are more likely to be satisfied with their college experience than nonmembers (Astin 1975, 1977). Studies have indicated that
fraternity members are less likely to withdraw from college (Astin, 1975, 1977; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). Possible reasons include the encouragement given to pledges and members to maintain satisfactory grades and the social support system which helps to provide personal satisfaction with group affiliation.

With the research conducted, it appears that each institution needs to review its own fraternity system to determine whether or not the fraternity system has a place on each campus. Student involvement has become an area that is being closely watched. Fraternities are a built-in student involvement mechanism. Is this mechanism worth keeping? The literature provided proof that student involvement helps in retention and persistence. There is conflicting information about the worth of fraternities. This researcher explores the percentage of fraternity members graduating as compared to the students who do not join these organizations.
Methods and Results

Graduation rates are one key indicator for judging an institution's effectiveness. Hence their rates serve as a major assessment tool for colleges and universities. It follows that graduation rates can serve as an effective measure and indicator of the value of fraternity life on campuses. The contribution of fraternities can be judged through a comparison of the numbers who graduate compared to independent students who graduate. This study represents an attempt to assess the persistence to graduation of students who joined fraternities at Western Kentucky University. Specifically, the study dealt with students who pledged a fraternity from Fall Semester 1986 to Spring Semester 1991.

Research Hypotheses

As noted previously, the primary hypothesis tested during the study was as follows:

Hypothesis--Students who join social fraternities at Western Kentucky University graduate at a rate that is significantly higher than their counterparts who do not join social fraternities.

Conversely, the null hypothesis tested during the course of the study was as follows:

Null Hypothesis--Students who join social fraternities at Western Kentucky University do not graduate at a significantly higher rate than students who do not join a social fraternity.
**Data Collection**

Data for the current study was obtained from records from the Student Activities Office at Western Kentucky University and the SIS Student Information System. Upon joining a fraternity at Western Kentucky University, new pledges sign a release card with the Interfraternity Council allowing their academic records to be used in statistical research, academic rankings and scholarship programs. These records are maintained because of the desire of each organization and the fraternity system to keep an accurate record of membership and academic performance by its membership. The Interfraternity Council has a certain set of standards that each group must maintain to keep the individual group’s privileges as allowed by the university for fraternities. Individual records were examined by the researcher and information was obtained regarding each participant’s race, school year that they pledged their graduation status and membership status within the organization, initiation status, and organizational affiliation. Where data were missing, contact was made with local organizations, local advisors, and national/international organizations in order to determine needed information. All data collected was maintained anonymously. Personally identifiable records were not kept.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were generated for each variable considered during the study. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were computed in an effort to determine the degree of relationship between study variables. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed in an effort to determine if the sample group varied significantly according to the study variables considered. The level of statistical significance utilized
for the current study was .05. The variables analyzed included race, organizational affiliation, initiation status, and pledge year.

One thousand four hundred and sixty seven students attempted to join social fraternities at Western Kentucky University from the Fall 1986 to Spring 1991 semesters. Of these 1467 students, 1417 were white, 50 were black. One thousand and fifty nine students were initiated and 408 were not. Seven hundred and ninety six students graduated within five years from the institution for a graduation rate of 54.3%. Of the 671 (45.7%) who did not graduate, 119 transferred to another institution, and 3 students were physically unable to finish. The university male graduation rate is about 27.5 for this period. The class breakdown for students who pledged fraternities was Freshman, 909(45.1% graduating); Sophomore, 359(62.7%); Junior, 136(77.9%); Senior, 63(87.3%).

Students who pledged fraternities at Western Kentucky University during the time period studied graduated at a 54.3% rate. The all-student average was about 34.5% and the all-male average was about 27.5% during this period. Table 1 contains a summary of this data. The all-student and all-male averages considered only freshmen. Using only freshmen from the study group, subjects graduated at a rate of 45.1%. This percentage is significantly higher than the all-student/all-male average. Students pledging fraternities do graduate at a significantly higher percentage. The percentage is even higher for the students who were initiated into these organizations.
Table 1

Western Kentucky University Graduation Rates*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The WKU Fact Book has data for these three years of the current study

Race

For the purposes of the present study, race was divided into two categories, Black and White. Participants included 1417 students that were White and 50 that were Black. Of the 1417 White students, 765 (54.0%) graduated; 652 (46.0%) did not. Of the 652 students who failed to graduate, 118 (8.3%) transferred, and 3 (0.2%) were physically unable to finish. Of the 50 Blacks students, 31 (62.0%) graduated, and 19 (38.0%) did not. Of the 19 students who failed to graduate, 1 (2.0%) transferred. Table 2 contains a summary of this data by race.
Table 2

Graduation Status by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Did Not Graduate</th>
<th>Transferred</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1417</td>
<td>765 (54.0%)</td>
<td>652 (46.0%)</td>
<td>118 (8.3%)</td>
<td>3 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31 (62.0%)</td>
<td>19 (38.0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pledge Year

Pledge year denotes the year that a student pledged an individual fraternal organization. The pledge year was determined according to the following classification guidelines: freshman are those students who have earned between 0 and 29 credit hours, sophomores have earned between 30 and 59 credit hours, juniors have earned between 60 and 90 credit hours, and seniors have earned over 90 hours. Nine hundred and nine students were classified as freshman. Of these 909 students 410 (45.1%) graduated. Of the 499 (54.9%) students who did not graduate, 88 (9.7%) transferred, and 2 (0.2%) could not physically finish. Three hundred fifty-nine students were sophomores. Of these 359 students, 225 (62.7%) graduated. Of the 134 (37.3%) students who did not graduate, 28 (7.8%) transferred. One hundred and thirty-six students were juniors. Of these 136 students, 106 (77.9%) graduated. Of the 29 (21.3%) students who did not graduate, 3 (2.2%) transferred and 1 (0.8%) could not physically finish. Sixty-three students were seniors. Of these 63 students, 55 (87.3%) graduated. Eight students (12.7%) did not graduate. Table 3 provides a summary by pledge year.
Table 3

Graduation Status by Pledge Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pledge Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Did Not Graduate</th>
<th>Transferred</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman (Under 30 hours)</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>410 (45.1%)</td>
<td>499 (54.9%)</td>
<td>88 (9.7)</td>
<td>2 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore (30-60 hours)</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>225 (62.7%)</td>
<td>134 (37.3%)</td>
<td>28 (7.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior (60-90 hours)</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>106 (77.9%)</td>
<td>30 (21.3%)</td>
<td>3 (2.2%)</td>
<td>1 (0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior (over 90 hours)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>55 (87.3%)</td>
<td>8 (12.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initiation Status

Initiation Status has three categories: initiated, depledged (personal choice/chapter choice), or depledged (did not make required GPA for initiation). One thousand and fifty-nine students were initiated into these organizations. Of these students, 701 (66.2%) graduated and 358 (33.8%) did not. Of the 358 who did not graduate, 84 (7.9%) transferred, and 3 (0.3%) could not physically finish. Three hundred and eight depledged by either personal or chapter choice. Of these students, 92 (29.9%) did graduate and 216 (70.1%) did not. Of the 216 who did not graduate, 35 (11.4%) transferred. One hundred depledged because of not meeting the GPA initiation requirement. Of these students, 3 (3.0%) graduated and 97 (97.0%) did not. Table 4 provides a summary by initiation status.
Table 4

Graduation Status by Initiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiation Status</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Did Not Graduate</th>
<th>Transferred</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiated</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>701 (66.2%)</td>
<td>358 (33.8%)</td>
<td>84 (7.9%)</td>
<td>3 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depledged-Choice</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>92 (29.9%)</td>
<td>216 (70.1%)</td>
<td>35 (11.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depledged-Grades</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3 (3.0%)</td>
<td>97 (97.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organization Status

This study involved thirteen organizations. Ninety-six students pledged Alpha Gamma Rho. Of these students, 53 (55.2%) graduated and 43 (44.7%) did not. Of the 43 who did not graduate, 3 (3.1%) transferred, and 2 (2.1%) physically could not finish.

Twenty-six students pledged Alpha Phi Alpha. Of these students, 16 (61.5%) graduated, 10 (38.4%) did not. Of the 10 who did not graduate, 1 (3.8%) transferred. One hundred twenty-six students pledged Delta Tau Delta. Of these students, 69 (54.8%) graduated and 57 (45.2%) did not. Of the 57 who did graduate, 14 (11.1%) transferred. One hundred and fifty students pledged Kappa Alpha Order. Of these students, 82 (54.7%) graduated and 68 (45.3%) did not. Of the 68 who did not graduate, 10 (6.7%) transferred.

Twenty-two students pledged Kappa Alpha Psi. Of these students, 14 (63.6%) graduated and 8 (36.4%) did not. One hundred and fifty-five students pledged Kappa Sigma. Of these students, 76 (49.0%) graduated and 79 (51%) did not. Of the 79 who did not graduate, 16 (10.3%) transferred. One hundred and forty-three students pledged Lambda
Chi Alpha. Of these students, 72 (50.3%) graduated and 71 (49.7%) did not. Of the 71 who did not graduate, 20 (14.0%) transferred. One hundred and thirty-eight students pledged Phi Delta Theta. Of these students, 84 (60.8%) graduated and 54 (39.1%) did not. Of the 54 who did not graduate, 12 (8.7%) transferred. One hundred and thirteen students pledged Pi Kappa Alpha. Of these students, 59 (52.2%) graduated and 54 (47.8%) did not. Of the 54 who did not graduate, 10 (8.8%) transferred. One hundred and forty-six students pledged Sigma Alpha Epsilon. Of these students, 88 (60.3%) graduated and 58 (39.7%) did not. Of the 58 who did not graduate, 11 (7.5%) transferred. One hundred twenty-eight students pledged Sigma Chi. Of these students, 72 (56.3%) graduated and 56 (43.7%) did not. Of the 56 who did not graduated, 12 (9.4%) transferred. One hundred and thirty-five students pledged Sigma Nu. Of these students, 76 (56.3%) graduated and 59 (43.7%) did not. Of the 59 who did not graduate, 9 (6.7%) transferred. Eighty-nine students pledged Sigma Phi Epsilon. Of these students, 35 (39.3%) graduated and 54 (60.7%) did not. Of 54 students who did not graduate, 1 (1.1%) transferred. Table 5 contains a breakdown of graduation status by organizational affiliation.
Table 5

Graduation Status by Organizational Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Did Not Graduate</th>
<th>Transferred</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Gamma Rho</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>53(55.2%)</td>
<td>43(44.7%)</td>
<td>3(3.1%)</td>
<td>2(2.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Phi Alpha</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16(61.5%)</td>
<td>10(38.4%)</td>
<td>1(3.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta Tau Delta</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>69(54.8%)</td>
<td>57(45.2%)</td>
<td>14(11.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kappa Alpha</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>82(54.7%)</td>
<td>68(45.3%)</td>
<td>10(6.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kappa Alpha Psi</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14(63.6%)</td>
<td>8(36.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kappa Sigma</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>76(49.0%)</td>
<td>79(51.0%)</td>
<td>16(10.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambda Chi Alpha</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>72(50.3%)</td>
<td>71(49.7%)</td>
<td>20(14.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi Delta Theta</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>84(60.9%)</td>
<td>54(39.1%)</td>
<td>12(8.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pi Kappa Alpha</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>59(52.2%)</td>
<td>54(47.8%)</td>
<td>10(8.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigma Alpha Epsilon</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>88(60.3%)</td>
<td>58(39.7%)</td>
<td>11(7.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigma Chi</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>72(56.3%)</td>
<td>56(43.7%)</td>
<td>12(9.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigma Nu</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>76(56.3%)</td>
<td>59(43.7%)</td>
<td>9(6.7%)</td>
<td>1(0.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigma Phi Epsilon</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>35(39.3%)</td>
<td>54(60.7%)</td>
<td>1(1.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were computed between each of the variables considered within the context of the current study. The results of these correlations are found in Table 6.
Table 6

Results of Pearson Product-Moment Correlations for the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Graduation Status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Affiliation</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pledge Year</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>SIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation Status</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>SIG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correlation coefficient between year pledged and graduation status was -.23, which indicates that there is a relationship between the two variables and that it is significant at the .05 level. The correlation coefficient between organization affiliation and graduation status was -.01, which indicates that there is no strong relationship between the two variables and that it is not significant at the .05 level. The correlation coefficient between race and graduation was -.04, which indicates that there is no strong relationship between the two variables and it is not significant at the .05 level. The correlation coefficient between initiation status was .27, which indicates that there is a relationship between the two variables and that it is significant at the .05 level. Both year pledged and initiation status were found to be significantly related to graduation status at the .05 level.

Students who pledged later tended to graduate at a higher rate than students who pledged earlier in their careers. The data shows that the later the pledge date in one's college career, the better the chance a person has to graduate from the institution.
Pledges who were initiated also tended to graduate at a higher rate than those who were not initiated. The association between organizational affiliation and race was not significant at the .05 level. Although statistically significant correlation coefficients between variables was consistently low.

**Analysis of Variance.** Table 7 contains the results of the Analysis of Variance utilized to determine if the students differed significantly in regards to their graduation status when grouped according to the various factors examined during the study. As shown in Table 7, significant differences were noted in both year pledged and initiation status. Race and organizational affiliation did not demonstrate significant differences. This finding further reinforces the Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Coefficients as described previously. Using this analysis, it was shown that students who were initiated into a fraternity graduate at a rate that is significantly higher than that of the general university population. Based on these results, it is possible to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that students who join social fraternities at Western Kentucky University graduated from the university at a significantly higher rate than their counterparts who do not join social fraternities.
### Table 7

**Results of Analysis of Variance for Graduation Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Affiliation</td>
<td>.796</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.655</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>2.665</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pledge Year</td>
<td>28.582</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>SIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>63.244</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>SIG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion and Recommendations

The current study tends to support the hypothesis that both Black and White students who joined a fraternity are more likely to graduate than students who do not. The percentage of Black students who graduate is around 17% overall. The percentage of Black students who have joined a fraternity is about 62%.

The year a student pledges also makes a significant difference in graduation rates. As a result of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlations and the Analysis of Variance, the year a student pledges is a significant factor. The later in one's college career that one's joins a fraternity the higher the probability that one will graduate. This result can be explained in a number of ways. Students who join fraternities after their freshman year seem to be better prepared for the challenge of fraternity and academic life. Western Kentucky University loses about 35% of its male freshman class after its first year, about 10% after its second year, and about 7% in its third year (WKU Fact Book, 1995). These percentages support the hypothesis that a male student who survives the freshman year has doubled his chances of graduating. Freshman that pledge a fraternity have a 10% higher percentage in graduating from the university. Freshman graduate in five years at a 35% rate. The students who pledge a fraternity graduate at a 45.1% rate.

Initiation Status plays a major factor in determining if one will graduate. This factor was pointed out by both the Pearson Product-Moment correlations and the Analysis of Variance as a significant factor. If a student was initiated into a fraternal organization, he had about a two in three chance (66.2%) of graduating. If a student is depledged by his
choice or the chapter's choice, the likelihood of graduation is less than 30%. If a student was not initiated because of not meeting the grade requirement for initiation then the student’s chances of graduation dropped to 3%. This major percentage drop shows the tremendous effect that not initiating into a fraternity after pledging has on the student’s chances of graduating.

Individual fraternities exhibit graduation rates ranging from 39.3% to 63.6%. The two historically black organizations, Alpha Phi Alpha and Kappa Alpha Psi, were the two organizations with the highest graduation rate. This factor in itself is a strong recommendation for Black males to join a fraternal organization.

NPHC fraternities (historically black fraternities) have made it a national policy that students can not join their organizations until at least the second semester of their freshman or their sophomore year. These groups have placed emphasis on students getting their academic footing before joining their organizations. This policy came into effect in the Fall 1992 semester. Seventy-two percent of the students who joined the NPHC fraternities (Alpha Phi Alpha and Kappa Alpha Psi) were sophomores or above before they pledged the individual fraternities during the time period of the study.

Individual organizations graduation rates range from 39.3% to 63.6% for a difference of more than 20%. This figures shows that organizations either recruit better students or offer a program more conducive to graduation. Many times, in the minds of the public, fraternities are grouped together. However, the current study shows a significant difference between fraternal organizations at Western Kentucky University.

Another issue concerns transfer students. At Western Kentucky University, a
number of students transfer before they graduate. There are a variety of reasons why the students transfer. Many students that pledge a fraternity find it is easier to transfer to another institution because of their fraternity membership. If there is another chapter of their particular fraternity, they have a built in support system at another institution. One hundred and nineteen or eight percent of the students involved in the study transferred to another institution of higher education. Fraternity members transferred to finish their academic program such as physical therapy and engineering. Other members transferred because they could also transfer their fraternity membership to another campus, i.e., University of Kentucky, University of Tennessee. Many transferred because of their desire to attend another institution.

The current study has several implications for student affairs professionals working with fraternities. The most profound implication is that a person who does not make the grade point requirement to be initiated is at-risk and has only about a 3% chance of graduating. Most fraternity chapters at WKU allow a pledge two semesters to make this requirement. If a person does not make the requirement after the first semester, the student should be counseled during his second semester. Secondly, the organizations that are on the lower end of the graduation scale need attention and help to design programs that can increase the members chance to persist to graduation. The organization (Sigma Phi Epsilon) that was at the lowest end of the scale was reorganized at the end of the study's time frame. The low graduation rate was a symptom of many other problems within the chapter.
Limitations of the Study

The current study demonstrates that fraternities have a relationship between members and persistence to graduation from Western Kentucky University. I did not take into account the reasons why members graduate at a higher percentage than their non-fraternity counterparts; nor did I use demographic and background factors and their effects upon persistence. I did not take into account the emotional impact that membership in fraternity can have upon an individual. With the new NPHC policy of no beginning freshmen pledging, freshman year does not hold as much importance for these groups.

Recommendations

These study results demonstrated that fraternity membership related with a student’s persistence to graduation. The graduation percentages were significantly higher for students who pledged a fraternity and especially for ones who were initiated. The study result show that the students who pledged fraternities and were not initiated, do not graduate from the university. The following recommendations are made based upon this study:

1. Develop a program to help students who pledge a fraternity and do not make the GPA initiation requirement. This program would include educational programming, counseling, and academic advising.

2. Evaluate individual organization’s pledge programs to insure that they are conducive for new students and the goal of persistence.

3. Continue to examine if freshman year membership in fraternities is conducive to
the mission of the university by using a variety of tools for the evaluation.

4. Watch closely the organizations that have the lower graduation rates for the types of, if any, programming that they are using to help members with persistence to graduate.

5. Provide educational programming for the organization on retention of members, academic services provided by the university, study skills, time management and topics which will assist these organizations in helping their membership toward graduation.

Further studies can be done on the factors that the individual student possesses. Do students that join fraternities have higher ACT/SAT scores and are they better prepared entering college? Do students who join come from higher socio-economic backgrounds? Are they from rural or urban areas and high schools? Are fraternity members more involved in campus activities? Do the programs that the fraternities offer have an effect toward persistence? Does fraternity life make the transition to college life easier? These are a few questions that can be further explored to determine the impact of fraternity life upon its members.
References


