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# Educating Undergraduate Student Leaders: A Study of Learning in a Leadership Program of a National Fraternity

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*Leadership development experiences have long been touted as necessary and positive for promoting the practice of effective leadership. Yet, little has been presented about the effectiveness of leadership development programs sponsored, designed, and implemented by membership-based organizations, like fraternities and sororities. This study examines the efficacy of a national fraternity-sponsored leadership development program for chapter presidents in facilitating a meaningful developmental experience and encouraging long-term learning gains. Data collected at three intervals throughout the year in which program attendees were in office were analyzed using ANOVA and t-tests to identify the specific areas in which students reported learning gains and then measured examining the extent to which learning was retained.*

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The concepts of student engagement and involvement are sometimes used interchangeably and often conflated (Tillapaugh, 2019; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Student engagement was defined by Kuh (2009) as the amount of time and effort that students invest in activities that are directly correlated with the outcomes that are desired from a college experience, as well as the institutional plans that allow students to participate in activities of this nature. The concept of student involvement proposed by Astin (1984) was location-based. According to Astin, the more time students spend physically present on campus, the greater the likelihood that they would participate in campus activities including events, organizations, and contact with instructors.

Astin (1984) formulated five tenets or *postulates* regarding student involvement. He outlined that involvement is an iterative process that requires students to invest varying amounts of psychosocial and physical energy and that student development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of their participation (Astin, 1984, 2010). Students are in charge of determining how they spend their time and with whom, including how much time they devote to their studies, their friends, their family, and any other extracurricular activities (Astin, 1984).

In contrast, was engagement theory, which was conceptualized by George Kuh

(2009) as being an institutional theory, involvement theory was conceived of as being student-centered. Because meaningful involvement requires making an investment of one's energy in their own relationships, academics, and activities that are pertinent to the on-campus experience, he underscored that the duty for engagement lies with the institution (Kuh, 2009). Due to such factors, students may be dissuaded from participating in extracurricular activities, which might deprive them of the educational benefits associated with such participation and lead to a lack of academic and social integration (Tillapaugh, 2019; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

Thus, fraternity involvement in undergraduate leadership development programs rests within the boundaries of these two foundational college impact models. This is in congruence with Braxton et al. (2013), who conceptualized a more specific form of engagement by defining the term as the amount of psychological energy that students invest in their participation in social interactions with their peers and in extracurricular activities. The psychosocial benefits of fraternity and leadership participation are strongly encouraged as part of an institution's commitment to student success and are outlined in various campus standards programs for sororities and fraternities (Bureau et al., 2020; Sasso, 2012).

To complement campus student engagement and leadership development, national fraternities and sororities have developed their own programs dedicated to training and developing chapter leaders (Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Bureau et al., 2020). Along with supporting their mission of personal development and social connection, national fraternal organizations hope their members become effective leaders during their time in college and beyond graduation. During their time in college, effective chapter leaders support the operations and success of their chapter or campus organization.

Fraternities as organizations are founded on the values of brotherhood, philanthropy and service, and academic excellence (Sasso et al., 2020). Leadership practice can have a positive impact on the leadership development of their members despite the potential and often actual challenges posed by identity dynamics (division by race, gender, religion, and social class). Leadership development is touted as a benefit of fraternity membership by all chapters and governing councils (Atkinson et al., 2010; Barber et al., 2015). How leadership and sense of identity connect in a chapter setting are often consistent with the explicit and tacit standards of an individual chapter and the sorority/fraternity community, which are frequently related to

identity dynamics (Barber et al., 2015; Cory, 2011; Hevel et al., 2014, 2015, 2018).

Participation in fraternity activities may result in the development of leadership skills, and research suggests that holding a leadership role within a fraternity is associated with considerable psychological benefits. There is a correlation between joining a sorority or fraternity and an increase in the amount of time spent volunteering and being involved in the community (Asel et al., 2009). Students who are also more involved on campus have a better sense of purpose and gain from exercising leadership and strengthening their leadership skills (DiChiara, 2009; Long, 2012). To date, little research exists that supports the notion that leadership development programs for undergraduate student leaders facilitate intended learning outcomes and help undergraduate leaders more effectively lead their organizations (Hevel et al., 2014, 2015, 2018). This study aims to address the gap in the current literature regarding the effectiveness and outcomes of nationally-sponsored leadership programs. We aim to use the findings of this study to explore and provide support for the efficacy of these types of leadership programs.

### **Literature Review**

Extant research suggests that students who participate in extracurricular activities achieve better educational outcomes than those who do not (Goedereis & Sasso, 2020;

Kuh, 2009). However, there are significant limitations in the existing research, as noted by Sasso et al. (2020). We center the limited research to focus on fraternity/sorority leadership development programs and psychosocial involvement outcomes.

### **Leadership Outcomes from Membership**

Participation in a fraternity generally suggests there are positive educational outcomes (Martin et al., 2012; Pike, 2020). DeBard and Sacks (2011) conducted a large study on fraternity/sorority membership and academic performance which supported that students who joined fraternity/sorority organizations had more credit hours as well as higher GPAs than non-affiliated students during their first year of college, rejecting the notion that fraternity/sorority-affiliated first-year students attain lower GPAs than non-affiliated students, which has been suggested by studies done within a single institution (Debard et al., 2006).

Similarly, Pike (2000; 2003; 2020) found a modest but positive association between fraternity/sorority affiliations and gains in learning, such as active learning and interactions with faculty. These findings also support Pike (2000, 2003, 2020) that found learning gains were stronger for fraternity and sorority members in their senior years than in their first years in college. This means that it is important for fraternity/sorority organizations to provide continual

engagement opportunities to help students develop academically during their time in college and in the organization. Similarly, other research found that fraternity men scored higher on various psychosocial and mental health/wellness scales than non-members across all years of college (Dugan, 2008; Grace et al., 2022; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000).

Hayek et al. (2002) found that students affiliated with fraternities and sororities reported higher personal and social skills related to higher levels of communication and critical thinking compared to those who were unaffiliated. These gains are also from involvement in community engagement and community service (Asel et al., 2009). Other gains include collaborative work (Martin et al., 2008), and commitment (Dugan, 2008). A large national study found that fraternity/sorority members gain skills in leadership, service, and friendship (Long, 2012). More importantly, these findings related to student growth in fraternity/sorority organizations have essential long-term implications for students beyond their collegiate experience.

General sorority/fraternity participation leads to significant increases in involvement and gains in leadership development during the first year of college compared to unaffiliated students (Aren et al., 2014; DiChiara, 2009; Martin et al., 2012), but

these gains are equalized by the senior year in which there are no significant differences (Hevel et al., 2014). Chapter leaders demonstrate gains in leadership skills, diverse interactions, sense of belonging, interpersonal relationship skills, and self-perceived leadership ability (Long & Snowden, 2011; Martin et al., 2012). Chapter leaders also self-report they believe in their ability to influence others at a higher rate than unaffiliated student leaders (Hevel et al., 2014).

Members are more engaged on campus, develop a higher sense of purpose, form leadership skills, and gain access to formal opportunities to practice and gain leadership experiences (DiChiara, 2009; Long, 2012). Theories of leadership about student leadership practices are rooted in the assumption that students have equal access to resources and support systems to grow toward their full potential (Bureau et al., 2021; Taylor, Jr. & Lawrence, 2020). Such factors may limit who has access to leadership roles and experiences or who is permitted to display leadership abilities within chapters. Participation in leadership position provides opportunities for members to benefit from significant gains in interpersonal skills of leadership (Kelley, 2008)

Kelley (2008) found that those who have served as chapter presidents in fraternities/sororities reported gains in

interpersonal skills, organizational skills, teamwork, and decision-making. Members holding formal leadership positions were less often recognized as effective leaders than the members with the strongest commitment (Adams & Keim, 2000; Harms et al., 2006). The emphasis on character-building skills and personal development is unique to fraternities or sororities, which is due to the quality and effort of student involvement. However, this remains an underexamined topic in the literature.

Participation in a fraternity or sorority leads to increases in significant involvement and gains in leadership development during the first year of college (Aren et al., 2014; DiChiara, 2009; Martin et al., 2012; Pearlman et al., 2023). However, these gains are equalized by unaffiliated students by their senior year in comparison to affiliated members, which suggests that over time there are no significant differences over time between affiliated and unaffiliated students (Hevel et al., 2014). After the first year of membership, there are slight improvements in cognitive development that may be attributed to fraternity involvement. These improvements include interpersonal growth, social engagement, collaborative work, and the capacity to influence others (Pascarella et al., 2006). Notably, improvements in interpersonal skills are among the most notable advances that may be made in terms of collaborative work and learning metrics

(Martin et al., 2012; Pike, 2000, 2003, 2020). By their senior year, members of fraternities experience tremendous growth, including an increased capacity to influence the behavior of others (Asel et al., 2009; Hevel et al., 2014; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Pike, 2003). Members of fraternities and sororities exhibit characteristics connected to leadership, community service, and friendship (Long, 2012). These abilities provide members a greater feeling of belonging, improve their capacity to interact with others, and enhance their perception of their own leadership potential (Long & Snowden, 2011; Martin et al., 2012).

There is a strong correlation between membership in a fraternity and successful academic performance (Martin et al., 2012; Pike, 2020). The development of one's leadership abilities, capacity for decision-making, and sense of personal competence are all considerably aided by participation in student leadership roles in campus organizations (Astin, 1993; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Kuh, 1995). In addition to the scholastic benefits, fraternities and sororities provide their members the chance to significantly improve their interpersonal and leadership abilities, which may lead to considerable career advancements (Kelley, 2008). Leadership development is a desired goal of membership across all chapters and governing councils, and the ways in which leadership and a person's sense of identity

interact vary depending on the setting of the chapter (Atkinson et al., 2010; Barber et al., 2015; Cory, 2011). Students exhibit leadership skills that are constrained by the explicit and tacit standards of their chapter and the community on their campus, which are tied to identity dynamics (Barber et al., 2015).

Leadership skills are developed in various ways by college women and men to negotiate diverse power hierarchies and achieve higher positions (Marsden & Andrade, 2018; Pearlman et al., 2023). Fraternity members tend to vote their own members into leadership positions, such as for the student government association (SGA), over female candidates who are better qualified to hold such positions (Goodman, 2021). Fraternity presidents also maintained confidence in their leadership ability up to ten years after college (Kelley, 2008); conversely, Harms et al. (2006) discovered that fraternity and sorority members holding leadership positions were less often recognized as effective leaders.

Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability are personality traits associated with leadership growth, which happens for many members whether they serve on a formal executive board or in other leadership roles (DiChiara, 2009; Harms et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2012). Becoming a leader or officer in a chapter is associated with a variety of

additional perks (Gastfield, 2020; Kelley, 2008; Long & Snowden, 2011). Gains in interpersonal skills, organizational skills, collaboration, and decision-making ability have been reported by fraternity and sorority chapter presidents (Kelley, 2008). Members of fraternity and sorority organizations have assessed their leaders as being effective and accurate representatives of their respective organizations (Adams & Keim, 2000). Those members of the organization who have shown the deepest level of dedication get the highest ratings (Dugan, 2008). This commitment is often earned by chapter leaders through participation in campus programs such as executive meetings, retreats, and roundtable discussions (Long & Snowden, 2011).

### **National Sorority/Fraternity Leadership Programs**

Students seek leadership skills to grow during their undergraduate experience (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Schoper et al., 2020). Participation in formal leadership development programs as a form of student engagement facilitates gains in confidence, leadership skills, and openness to serve in a leadership role (Pearlman et al., 2023; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). Kezar and Moriarty (2000) found that men who participated in a leadership class developed higher rates of leadership skills. For other formal programs, participation

leads to significantly higher scores higher on common purpose and citizenship traits (Dugan, 2006).

Prior studies have highlighted the effectiveness of programming for sorority and fraternity members at both the national and campus-based levels. This type of programming has proven levels of success in academics, service, and leadership development at both private and public higher education institutions (Dugan, 2008; Isacco et al., 2013). In a 10-year program evaluation of a national fraternity emerging leader program which elucidated that program participants were more likely to assume a leadership role eventually becoming chapter president, participants self-reported a stronger connection to their organizational ritual and values, and increased fraternity commitment (Biddix & Underwood, 2010). Such programs are common and provide additional specialized training to develop technical and leadership abilities necessary for their position responsibilities, but also involve leadership development to help facilitate shared leadership and organizational management (Biddix & Underwood, 2010).

Chapter leaders get further specialized training to strengthen their technical talents so that they can perform their position's obligations. In addition, they participate in leadership development activities so that shared leadership and



organizational management may be more easily implemented. Past studies have shown that participating in leadership development programs for fraternity members may boost one's degree of academic performance, level of service to others, and level of leadership competence (Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Dugan, 2008; Isacco et al., 2013). Despite having data such as GPA, membership rosters, initiation rates, chapter consultations, and needs-based or satisfaction surveys, there is a lack of published assessment findings about these nationally-sponsored organizational leadership programs, despite the fact that these programs have existed for years (Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Hesp & Biddix, 2009; Sasso et al., 2020). This study aims to address the gap in the current literature regarding the effectiveness and outcomes of leadership programs sponsored by national organizations and the findings of this study are intended to explore and provide support for the efficacy of these leadership programs.

### **Research Site**

This study explores the leadership development program for one national fraternity from the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC). This leadership program is an annual two-day event designed to educate incoming chapter presidents on their roles and responsibilities as well as effective leadership and chapter

management. The curriculum is rooted in a general leadership philosophy of socially responsible leadership to reinforce the organizational values of the national fraternity (Dugan, 2008). During the program, participants engage in large and small group sessions that focus on a variety of topics intended to help them develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively lead and manage their chapter. This study involved surveying program attendees at three intervals during their term as their chapter's president.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test survey design. The independent variable in this study was the leadership program. The dependent variable in this study was the time interval of the pre-test and post-test surveys. This study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) Can dedicated programs for fraternity chapter leaders facilitate leadership development and growth related to program outcomes?
- 2) Do students who attend these programs sustain knowledge and behavior change over time?

### **Sample**

This was a singular organizational study of one national fraternity in which purposive

sampling methods were utilized to identify a convenience sample of study participants ( $n = 75$ ). All study participants were undergraduate members of the fraternity who currently held the position of chapter president.

### **Procedure**

The same pre-test/post-test survey was used at three distinct intervals in which all program attendees were invited to participate in each of the three collection periods. In the pre-test collection, 98 program attendees completed the survey. The post-test collection period engaged 109 participants, and the second follow-up post-test engaged 75 participants. There was participant mortality or attrition because the last post-test was administered ten months after the leadership program. Participants may have prematurely left their chapter president role prior to the follow-up collection period.

### **Instrument**

The same pre-test/post-test survey was used at each of the three intervals. The survey was designed to assess program outcomes in two distinct domains: knowledge and abilities, and behavior and action. The first domain of knowledge and abilities contained statements such as "Can identify risky behavior associated with fraternity and sorority life" and "Can evaluate my chapter's financial operations." Study participants were asked to use a five-point Likert-type scale statement ranging from strongly disagree to

strongly agree to report their knowledge and abilities. The second domain of behavior and action aspect contained statements such as "Identified risky behavior associated with fraternity & sorority life" and "Evaluated my chapter's financial operations." For behavior and action outcomes, participants were asked to report their engagement in designated behaviors or actions using a three-point Likert-type scale, including "I have not engaged in this behavior or activity," "I have engaged in this behavior or activity to some extent" or "I have engaged in this behavior or activity." Content validity was facilitated by the fraternity educational programs team, who are responsible for designing the curriculum and program structure and refined the program outcomes that served as the constructs of the instrument used in this study. To reduce bias, the instrument was created by a team of external researchers who also conducted the analysis. Criterion validity was facilitated by piloting the survey with current undergraduate fraternity members and was reviewed by the educational program prior to survey administration. These processes were intentionally taken to promote the validity of the instrument and ensure the instrument's accurate results that reflect the program's activities.

### **Data Analysis**

To assess the differences in reported knowledge and abilities for program

outcomes across the three test intervals, ANOVA tests were conducted. Similar analyses were conducted for reported behavior and actions for program outcomes. A post-hoc analysis was conducted to determine the exact differences between the three test intervals. Additionally, two *t*-tests were performed for outcomes in which there were data from only two collection intervals available. All analyses were conducted using

a 95% significance level. All data were analyzed using IBM SPSS software.

## Results

### Knowledge and Abilities

Statistically significant differences were observed among several of the program outcomes related to knowledge and abilities between the three collection intervals (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Knowledge and Ability Program Outcomes*

		<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Financial Operations Evaluation</i>	Between groups	2	5.48	2.74	4.00	0.019*
	Within groups	276	189.28	.68		
	Total	278	194.778			
<i>Addressing Financial Operations Concern</i>	Between groups	2	14.98	7.49	9.61	<.001*
	Within groups	276	215.11	.77		
	Total	278	230.09			
<i>Using Recruitment Resources</i>	Between groups	2	20.23	10.19	11.934	<.001*
	Within groups	276	234.02	.84		
	Total	278	254.26			
<i>Running a Chapter Meeting</i>	Between groups	2	6.39	3.19	15.66	.011*
	Within groups	276	192.49	.69		
	Total	278	198.89			
<i>Recognition of Key Components of Ritual</i>	Between groups	2	23.03	11.51	11.30	<.001*
	Within groups	276	285.57	1.03		
	Total	278	308.60			
	Between groups	2	34.96	17.48	15.66	<.001*

<i>Confidence in Leading Ritual</i>	Within groups	276	308.03	1.11		
	Total	278	342.99			
<i>Evaluating Academic Operations</i>	Between groups	2	5.52	2.76	4.49	.012*
	Within groups	276	169.89	.61		
	Total	278	175.41			
<i>Addressing Academic Operations Concerns</i>	Between groups	2	12.82	6.41	10.59	<.001*
	Within groups	276	167.04	.60		
	Total	278				
<i>Increasing Accountability</i>	Between groups	2	35.62	17.81	21.49	<.001*
	Within groups	276	228.74	.82		
	Total	278	264.37			

\* $p < .05$

Through the use of Tukey HSD post hoc comparison (Table 2), the following outcomes for knowledge and abilities were found to have a significantly higher mean for post-program responses than pre-program included the ability to: (1) evaluate chapter finances; (2) address areas of concern related to chapter finances; (3) utilize the organization's recruitment resources to create a recruitment plan for the chapter; (4) properly run a chapter meeting; (5) recognize key components of the organization's ritual; (6) have confidence in leading key components of the organization's ritual; (7) evaluate chapter academic practices; (8)

address areas of concern related to chapter academic practices; and (9) increase member accountability using the organization's offense protocol. The significantly higher reported means for these outcomes at the post-program interval indicates that the program is providing an opportunity for students to learn new knowledge and increase their abilities to lead their chapters (Table 2). Additionally, with the post-program collection period taking place one month after the program's conclusion, the results indicate that program attendees remembered and retained the program's content.

## Table 2

*Summary of Post Hoc Analysis of Knowledge and Ability Program Outcomes*

		<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Significant Differences Observed
<i>Financial Operations Evaluation</i>	Pre-Program	97	4.04	.776	*Post
	Post-Program	107	4.36	.851	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.27	.859	
<i>Addressing Financial Operations Concern</i>	Pre-Program	97	3.82	.902	*Post and Follow-Up
	Post-Program	107	4.36	.816	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.21	.949	*Pre
<i>Using Recruitment Resources</i>	Pre-Program	97	3.71	.912	*Post and Follow-Up
	Post-Program	107	4.30	.871	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.24	.998	*Pre
<i>Running a Chapter Meeting</i>	Pre-Program	97	4.24	.863	*Post and Follow-Up
	Post-Program	107	4.55	.768	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.56	.889	*Pre
<i>Recognition of Key Components of Ritual</i>	Pre-Program	97	3.74	1.034	*Post
	Post-Program	107	4.26	1.040	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.43	.961	*Pre
<i>Confidence in Leading Ritual</i>	Pre-Program	97	3.53	1.110	*Post and Follow-Up
	Post-Program	107	4.16	1.083	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.37	.941	*Pre
<i>Evaluating Academic Operations</i>	Pre-Program	97	4.22	.767	*Post
	Post-Program	107	4.52	.744	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.49	.860	
<i>Addressing Academic Operations Concerns</i>	Pre-Program	97	4.06	.814	*Post and Follow-Up
	Post-Program	107	4.50	.744	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.53	.777	*Pre
	Pre-Program	97	3.67	.997	*Post and Follow-Up

<i>Increasing Accountability</i>	Post-Program	107	4.47	.781	*Pre
	Follow-Up	75	4.33	.963	*Pre

\* $p < .05$

Aside from evaluating chapter finances, all the knowledge and ability outcomes in which post-program means were higher than pre-program means also saw a statistically significant difference in means between the pre-program and follow-up collection periods, with mean scores being higher at the follow-up interval. The significantly higher mean scores at the follow-up interval indicate that not only are students reporting learning gains at the post-program interval after one month, but they are sustaining knowledge and ability gains multiple months after the program.

### Behaviors and Actions

Statistically significant differences were observed among several program outcomes related to behavior and actions between the three collection intervals (Table 3). These items are measured by asking to what extent respondents have engaged in designated activities with the intention of measuring the application of program learning outcomes through reported behavior.

**Table 3**

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Behavior and Action Program Outcomes*

		<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Financial Operations Evaluation</i>	Between groups	2	9.51	4.75	18.86	<.001*
	Within groups	275	69.33	.25		
	Total	277	78.84			
<i>Addressing Financial Operations Concern</i>	Between groups	2	5.60	2.80	8.66	<.001*
	Within groups	273	88.34	.32		
	Total	275	93.95			
<i>Using Recruitment Resources</i>	Between groups	2	8.12	4.06	7.51	.001*
	Within groups	275	148.74	.54		
	Total	277	156.86			
	Between groups	2	4.74	2.37	8.99	<.001*

<i>Running a Chapter Meeting</i>	Within groups	275	72.61	.26		
	Total	277	77.36			
<i>Evaluating Academic Operations</i>	Between groups	2	4.88	2.44	7.78	.001*
	Within groups	274	85.87	.31		
	Total	276	90.75			
<i>Addressing Academic Operations Concerns</i>	Between groups	2	6.22	3.11	8.58	<.001*
	Within groups	275	99.68	.36		
	Total	277	105.91			

\* $p < .05$

Through the use of Tukey HSD post hoc comparison (Table 4), the following outcomes for behavior and actions were found to have a significantly higher mean for post-program responses than pre-program: (1) evaluating chapter financial operations; (2) addressing areas of concern for chapter financial operations; (3) utilizing the

organization's recruitment resources to create a recruitment plan for the chapter; (4) properly running a chapter meeting; (5) evaluating chapter academic practices; and (6) addressing areas of concern for chapter academic practices.

**Table 4**

*Summary of Post Hoc Analysis of Behavior & Action Program Outcomes*

		<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Significant Differences Observed
<i>Financial Operations Evaluation</i>	Pre-Program	97	2.40	.589	Post and Follow-Up*
	Post-Program	107	2.79	.456	Pre*
	Follow-Up	74	2.80	.437	Pre*
<i>Addressing Financial Operations Concern</i>	Pre-Program	97	2.41	.641	Post and Follow-Up*
	Post-Program	107	2.72	.528	Pre*
	Follow-Up	74	2.69	.521	Pre*
	Pre-Program	97	2.03	.770	Post and Follow-Up*

<i>Using Recruitment Resources</i>	Post-Program	107	2.33	.737	Pre*
	Follow-Up	74	2.45	.685	Pre*
<i>Running a Chapter Meeting</i>	Pre-Program	97	2.58	.626	Post and Follow-Up*
	Post-Program	107	2.84	.459	Pre*
	Follow-Up	74	2.86	.416	Pre*
<i>Evaluating Academic Operations</i>	Pre-Program	97	2.49	.679	Post and Follow-Up*
	Post-Program	107	2.78	.478	Pre*
	Follow-Up	74	2.76	.491	Pre*
<i>Addressing Academic Operations Concerns</i>	Pre-Program	97	2.37	.697	Post and Follow-Up*
	Post-Program	107	2.68	.560	Pre*
	Follow-Up	74	2.69	.521	Pre*

\* $p < .05$

The significantly higher reported means for these outcomes at the post-program interval indicates attendees are more likely to report having engaged in hopeful behaviors and actions related to the program's learning outcomes. Meaning that not only did program attendees report increased knowledge and perceived ability, they applied knowledge gained at the program in their practice of leading their chapters.

Further, all the behavior and action outcomes in which post-program means were higher than pre-program means also saw a significant difference in means between the pre-program and follow-up collection periods, with mean scores being higher at the follow-up interval (Table 4). This indicates that, again, not only are students reporting applying knowledge through their

behaviors and actions at the post-program interval after one month, but these behaviors are continued multiple months after the program.

Additionally, two outcomes related to behavior and actions were not measured at the pre-program interval, so conducting ANOVA was not possible. From a *t*-test analysis, one of these outcomes, using the organization's offense protocol to increase accountability, showed significantly higher means at the follow-up interval ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = .607$ ) than at the initial collection at the post-program interval ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = .726$ ),  $t(180) = 2.24$ ,  $p = 0.025$ . This indicates that with time chapter presidents were more likely to engage in behaviors related to increasing member accountability.

## Discussion



The findings from this singular organizational study of a leadership program designed for chapter presidents suggest that leadership development programs sponsored and implemented by national fraternal organizations can facilitate meaningful and effective learning opportunities for undergraduate students. There are statistically significant gains in the reported outcomes between program attendee respondents at the pre-program and post-program intervals for chapter presidents participating in this leadership development program. Specifically, program attendees report having an increased knowledge in evaluating and addressing chapter finance practices, leading chapter meetings and rituals, practicing accountability, preparing for recruitment, and evaluating and addressing chapter academic practices.

This study addressed its primary research questions to determine the effectiveness of dedicated educational programs for fraternity chapter leaders in facilitating leadership development and growth related to program outcomes. The findings of this study support the hypothesis that undergraduate student leaders can have meaningful learning experiences through leadership development programs and obtain the intended knowledge and skills to practice effective leadership. This study also found support for its secondary research question regarding the long-term impacts of

leadership development programs on the students who attend. Students who participated in the program reported sustained knowledge and behavior throughout their time in their leadership role. The positive findings of this study provide evidence of the efficacy of leadership development programs designed for undergraduate students (Hevel et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2012; Parker & Pascarella, 2013, 2018)

Additionally, the comparison of pre-program and post-program responses indicates that program attendees report engaging in the behaviors and actions related to the program outcomes more after the program, thus applying new knowledge and utilizing new skills within their leadership role. Differences between the pre-program and post-program outcomes suggest that leadership programs can encourage learning gains and inspire students to engage in leadership behaviors. Position-specific leadership development programs are designed to provide students with an opportunity to gain new knowledge, develop skills, and prepare for opportunities to lead others and organizations (Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Parker & Pascarella, 2013, 2018). These findings demonstrate support for previous studies which highlighted the increased levels of knowledge, ability, and behaviors related to development after leadership program

engagement (Biddix & Underwood, 2010; Dugan, 2008; Isacco et al., 2013; Rosch & Caza, 2012).

Further, the findings indicate that the program encourages not only post-program gains related to the program's outcomes but also supports that program attendees retain and apply the knowledge and skills gained multiple months after they have attended the program. Several both knowledge and abilities and behavior and action program outcomes experienced significant increases when comparing pre-program and follow-up responses, which indicates that multiple months after the program attendees retained and utilized knowledge and skills gained at the program. The program strengthens participants' ability when it comes to aspects of the fraternity experience grounded in values and ritual which are connected to moral development in undergraduate students (Tull et al., 2022).

The follow-up interval outcomes gains compared to the pre-program responses showcase that students are not learning in the moment and forgetting important concepts shortly after the program ends. These experiences as chapter leaders are connected to career competency development (Peck, 2018; Peck & Callahan, 2019). As the program's purpose is to prepare students to lead their chapters through their role of president effectively, this study presents encouraging findings that

leadership development programs can serve as effective interventions to help undergraduate students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to serve and lead organizations (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Hesp & Biddix, 2009; Schoper et al., 2020; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999).

### **Limitations**

There are internal and external threats to the validity of this study. This was a singular organizational study that used self-report instruments that may facilitate response bias or socially desirable responses by study participants. This study instrument was not empirically validated and could have impacted the findings, although efforts were made to facilitate content and construct validity.

Additionally, this study used a convenience sample which may limit the generalizability to other similar NIC fraternities. There was no differentiation between student identities or institutional differences in which study participants were not asked to disclose their ethnicity, race, gender, or social class, as well as include their undergraduate institution.

There was also participant attrition in which each of the instrument time intervals was not totally equal. This latent attempt was intentional to allow program attendees to report experiences during a time they have been away from the program. However, there also could have been a maturation

effect as the follow-up survey was collected multiple months after the program. These study findings presented were only descriptive and exploratory, not causal, which means this study is not predictive. Future research should utilize a control group that would complete all three surveys at similar time intervals as the program participants may paint a more holistic picture for a longitudinal study. Other research can also examine whether members who did not complete the post-tests may be using these leadership skills in other areas.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study only examined a leadership program intended for chapter presidents facilitated by a singular national fraternity. This leadership program was intended for the head of a fraternity chapter: the chapter president. However, the promising findings can be gleaned which connect to future directions and implications for practice and can potentially be generalized to other fraternal organizations and campuses. The findings of this study present important implications for membership organizations and educators who work to design and deliver leadership development programs.

This study presents support for the effectiveness of leadership development programs for student leaders. Participants shared immediate and continued experiences of developed leadership because of the program. These findings

provide support rationale for investing in and providing leadership development experiences for undergraduate student leaders as the organizational goal of developing undergraduate leaders can be fulfilled through designated programming. However, organizations and campuses should consider the ways in which pathways toward serving as a chapter president are equitable (Bureau et al., 2021; Schoper et al., 2020). Emerging leader programs and other pipelines to a presidential position should be developmental and intentionally clear to members to consider who is granted access and permitted to display leadership abilities (Taylor, Jr. & Lawrence, 2020). This should often include invisible student populations such as commuters (Sasso & Paladini, 2021) as well as first-generation sensibilities in mind (Goedereis & Sasso, 2020; Harrel-Hallmark et al., 2022).

The long-term learning for program showcases the worthwhile investment leadership development programs can be for not only inspiring student leaders in an immediate sense but provide student leaders with knowledge and skills to use throughout their leadership role. Organizations sponsoring and designing leadership programs can look to the results of this study for supporting evidence that leadership development programs are not simply just a way to encourage students to lead but to

equip them to engage in behaviors and actions associated with effective leadership.

Although leadership programs have been shown to have a positive influence on the psychosocial development of fraternity members throughout their undergraduate experience, there is very little to no evidence that critical thinking growth takes place between the first and fourth years of college (Waltz & Sasso, 2021). Waltz and Sasso (2021) observed a correlation between higher levels of critical thinking and lower levels of implicit bias in college-aged males. When there was a stronger propensity to hold confirmation bias, male student leaders were more likely to have poorer critical thinking skills than when there was a lower tendency to retain confirmation bias. Male student non-leaders had a greater inclination to maintain confirmation bias. Fraternity leadership programs hold promise as a means of mitigating these effects in college-aged men (Lange & Stewart, 2019). Participation in a leadership class or formal program was the factor that best predicted a man's level of leadership ability (Dugan, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). To support the critical thinking gains that fraternity members make during their senior year, future leadership programs may include critical thinking development curricula and embrace notions of how students learn through a holistic experience. These ideas are based on the postulates of Astin (2010),

which were developed to explain how students acquire knowledge (Hevel et al., 2014, 2015, 2018).

The purpose of these recommendations for practice is to broaden the scope of currently available fraternity leadership programs and to find a solution to the *transfer problem*. This occurs when programs place an excessive amount of emphasis on learning outcomes but do not instruct participants on how to put their newly acquired leadership skills into practice (Reyes et al., 2019). Leadership programs such as the one highlighted in this study offer promise as sites of instruction to help college men develop a more multifaceted grasp of their world, which Schoper et al. (2020) described as supporting students to “notice, consider, question, and engage in their experiences” (p. 103). Student involvement professionals can assist national organizations and chapter presidents in evaluating preparedness and preparing students to return to their chapters to execute methods for meaningful dialogues and action.

### **Conclusion**

This study largely presents favorable and promising findings to support the use of leadership development programs to facilitate learning among undergraduate students. Due to the encouraging findings from this study, future studies both on fraternity or sorority national leadership

programs should be conducted as to provide further evidence to triangulate the effectiveness of these programs for undergraduate students across organizations. There is great potential to study similar types of programs sponsored

by peer organizations, or across councils, to develop a more universal and comprehensive understanding of the impact of leadership development programs on undergraduate students.

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