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**THE INFLUENCE OF FRATERNITY AND SORORITY MEMBERSHIP ON
RETENTION AND GPA AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY**

by

Arthur Gathercole Jr

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
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at
Rowan University

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Thesis Advisor: Andrew Tinnin, Ed.D

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Abstract

Arthur Gathercole Jr

THE INFLUENCE OF FRATERNITY AND SORORITY MEMBERSHIP ON
RETENTION AND GPA AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY

2018-2019

Dr. Andrew Tinnin

Master of Arts in Higher Education

There are multiple influences that effect retention and GPA for a student. The main objective of this study is to examine the social satisfaction and academic success of students who are active members of a fraternity or sorority at Rowan University. This study focuses on students who have been involved in a Greek-letter organization for two or more years to see how their involvement impacts their GPA and college career. With retention being a key factor in institutional ratings and ultimately contributing to degree attainment, it is a main focus for many colleges and universities.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Rowan University is a Carnegie-classified doctoral research institution dedicated to excellence in undergraduate education. It offers bachelor's through doctoral degree programs to 18,500 students on campuses in Glassboro, Camden and Stratford, New Jersey. Home to Cooper Medical School of Rowan University and the School of Osteopathic Medicine, it is only the second public university in the nation to grant both M.D. and D.O. medical degrees. (Rowan University, 2017).

FAFSA defined retention as “the percentage of a school's first-time, first-year undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year” (FAFSA, 2018). Many colleges and universities have been trying to understand retention factors and improve retention rates. Retention is important for colleges and universities because it is looking at the number of students who return to their second year of college. Higher education institutions are looking for more ideas on how to increase their retention rates of students to achieve a higher number of students who are socially and academically satisfied leading to graduation.

When people think of Greek life, they think of alcohol, parties, hazing, drugs, and sexual assault. Throughout the past two decades, Greek life at colleges has been thought as exclusive clubs that reject others who do not want to party. Most people do not realize that Greek life was founded for encouraging scholarship, expression, and fellowship. The function of these organizations stayed the same for a few centuries. Blake (2017) noted “Throughout the 19th century, college men began forming groups to discuss current

events, literature, and Greek and Latin.” (1). The students who founded Phi Beta Kappa were a group of five who wanted to participate in discussion on topics that were not in the current curriculum at the time. Appalachian State compiled an excellent history of Greek Life stating

Hence began the first organized, modern day debating and literary societies. Some universities fostered these organizations by encouraging students to think for themselves. Inevitably, the students in these groups began to form deeper relationships and depend on each other for more than just an intellectually stimulating conversation. (Appstate, 2015, 1)

The bonds created between these groups of students then shaped the idea that these students should live together. The “members” of these groups would live together in dorms or boarding houses. It was not until around the 1890s where Chapter Houses came into play. Appalachian State’s Greek History noted said most fraternities before this time had smaller numbers, with no more than 30 members if that. Therefore, they were able to hold meetings on campus in a hall or dorm room (Appstate, 2015). But their small numbers made it financially impossible to obtain a house for only the organization members to live in since they “essentially did not have enough members to pay the cost of renting, much less owning a house” (Appstate, 2015, 1). The beginning of chapter houses marked the start of a period of growth and success for fraternities and sororities.

Members of the Greek community continuously plan events on campus. They always host events for the student body at their school for a way to connect with each other. The Greek Life experience gives students a welcomed social outlet from the

demands of academics. Involvement in a fraternity or sorority has been linked to college satisfaction and retention (Astin, 1977). Involvement in a fraternity or sorority “has a substantial positive effect on persistence, overall satisfaction with college, and a satisfaction with instruction and social life”. (Astin, 1977)

Statement of the Problem

Fraternalities and sororities at colleges have been thought as exclusive clubs that reject others who do not want to party. Greek life has faced multiple negative stigmas throughout television and social media, especially with misconstruing pictures (Boyer & McDonald, 2012). People who avoid joining a Greek letter organization do not realize that fraternity and sorority life was founded to encourage scholarship, expression, and fellowship. These organizations should be looked at more positively and realize that they could be a tool for increasing the retention rates of students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine the social satisfaction and academic success of students who are members of fraternities and sororities at Rowan University. This study focuses on students who have been involved in a Greek-letter organization for two or more years and how their involvement impacts their college career.

Significance of the Study

The number of Greek letter organizations recognized by higher education institutions creates a significant population that is important to study. With retention

being a key factor in institutional ratings and ultimately contributing to degree attainment, it is a main focus for many colleges and universities. A sizeable portion of many campus' undergraduate population may be fraternity or sorority members. Therefore, analyzing the retention rates of these students, and their thoughts about college persistence, would provide valuable information.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study assumes all the students answered the survey truthfully. It is also assumed that all students being surveyed are in a Greek letter organization and they understand the concepts presented during the survey. There may be a researcher bias due to my own membership in a Greek-letter organization, but I will seek to provide student feedback verbatim whenever possible to address this.

Operational Definitions

1. **Greek-letter organization:** Social fraternities and sororities, or Greek letter organizations, or Greek-Life are social organizations at colleges and universities
2. **Retention:** The percentage of a school's first-time, first-year undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year.

Research Questions

This study explored the following questions:

1. Since becoming a member of a Greek-letter organization, did the membership make Rowan University more enjoyable?

2. In what ways, if any, did joining the organization provide motivation to return to Rowan University each semester?
3. Since becoming a member of a Greek-letter organization, is there an increase in your overall GPA?

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Chapter II offers a review of literature from various sources considered important to this study. This review analyzes current studies that relate student retention to joining a fraternity or sorority.

Chapter III illustrates the procedures and methodologies used in this study. Included are the context of the study, population, sample selection, demographics, data collection processes, and analysis of the data collected.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. This section revisits the research questions and summarizes the data on the influence of being a member of a Greek letter organization at Rowan University through interviews or a survey instrument.

Chapter V discusses the major findings in the study and offers recommendations for further study

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Fraternities and Sororities

The first fraternity that was founded was Phi Beta Kappa at the College of William and Mary in 1776. Phi Beta Kappa is an academic honor society that admits both men and women. The students who founded the fraternity were a group of five who wanted to participate in discussion on topics that were not in the current curriculum at the time. One of them was John Heath who was rejected by the two Latin secret societies on campus. He decided to take matters into his own hands and, along with some friends, created the first collegiate Greek-letter society, Phi Beta Kappa (Blake, 2016). As a Greek scholar, Heath began a tradition of naming college organizations after the initials of their secret Greek motto. In the case of Phi Beta Kappa, their motto *Philosophia Bios Kybernethes*, which can be translated to “Philosophy is the guide to life,” uses the Greek letters Phi, Beta and Kappa (the first letter of each word) as their society’s public name (Blake, 2016, 1).

There are multiple sororities and fraternities with different Greek letters. “Although there are some exceptions to the rule, fraternities are traditionally represented by two or three letters from the Greek alphabet and those letters' respective symbols” (Blake, 2016, 1). Most fraternities and sororities have a reason behind their name for when they were originally founded. Blake (2016) stated that “As the popularity of Phi Beta Kappa led to the creation of other fraternities, the precedent set by PBK led other

fraternities to adopt Greek mottos in order to name their organization” (Blake, 1). The reasoning behind using Greek letters was because the Greek language demonstrated academic standing. Many other societies and organizations were created with Greek letters. Presently, many schools have Greek organization, whether social, service, or academic. Diem (2016) stated that, “In some colleges, up to 70 percent of the student body is involved in some form of Greek life. However, some schools don’t allow Greek organizations due to stigmatism, low interest, or history. Many schools fall between the two extremes” (Diem, 2016, 1).

Student Involvement

A body of research has examined the relationship between fraternity/sorority membership, engagement in educationally-purposeful activities, and student learning and development (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009). Current studies examine students who intended to join a fraternity or sorority in their first year as a student. According to Astin’s Theory of Involvement, if affiliated students were more engaged in their educational experience they should report greater learning outcomes as a consequence of their greater involvement (Astin, 1999). Astin’s theory of student involvement discusses involvement in one club or organization has a positive effect on students (Astin, 1999). Astin’s theory of involvement studied student involvement in higher education. He observed that involvement included physical and psychological energy (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006).

Astin believed that motivation is an important aspect of involvement but what the student does or how they behave are also important aspects to examine in a study. things

Involvement in clubs and organizations has been shown to positively correlate with many different areas of psychosocial development, specifically with third year undergraduates. Astin's Theory of Involvement (1999, 519) has five postulates that define his theory (1) involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychosocial energy in various objects, (2) regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum, (3) involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features, (4) the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program, and (5) the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. Alan Gellin (2003) conducted eight different studies on the effects of undergraduate involvement for nine consecutive years compared to students who were not involved. Gellin found that there was a 14% gain in critical thinking compared to the students not involved in any clubs or organizations (Gellin, 2003).

Berger and Milem (1999) used Tinto's theory of student departure to study student retention. His model promotes the role of student involvement with improved educational outcomes for college students. He highlights the need to understand the relationship of student involvement and how it impacts the student persistence of remaining in school (Berger & Milem, 1999). Berger and Milem (1999) found that there were three ways in which student behaviors influence academic and social integration and improve Tinto's model: (a) examine direct effects among variables, (b) the initial model was developed in an exploratory manner, (c) the initial model used a proxy measure of persistence instead of first-year persistence.

Student Success

When people think of Greek life, a GPA boost is not one of the things they think about. In Greek-letter organizations, there is a GPA requirement that has to be maintained to be an active member. Normally the GPA requirement for freshmen to even be considered to receive a bid is a 2.5. The Greek life experience provides students with a welcoming social outlet from the stress of academic life. Astin (1977) found that membership in a Greek-letter organization “has a substantial positive effect on persistence, overall satisfaction with college, and satisfaction with instruction and social life” (Astin 1977, as cited in Nelson et. al, 2006). An individual might expect a difference between Greeks and non-Greeks, the difference could be a higher GPA and positive student persistence. GPA being important in recruiting individuals into the organizations.

A study by Nelson et al, 2006 looked at first-time, full-time students who were a part of a fraternity or sorority and their impact on GPA and retention. They looked at a cohort and checked in from semester 1, 4 and 10. They found that “members may begin their first semesters with a slightly higher GPA than the non-affiliated students, the gap in GPA narrowed by semester 10, with the fraternity/sorority members retaining a slight advantage. From their GPA perspective, they found that there was a greater retention rate with the Greek members than the non-affiliated members” (Nelson et al, 2006). They also looked at retention with Greek life members and found that there was 20% increase in both sororities and fraternities compared to the non-affiliated members.

The article by Pike (2000) discusses the influence of being in a Greek affiliated organization and the effect of the students’ college experience and cognitive

development. The research found was that Greek members and non-Greeks differed significantly in terms of social involvement and gains in general abilities, with the Greek students having a higher level of both social involvement and academic gains. The gains in students' general abilities were directly related to their levels of academic and social involvement

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review provides a brief history of fraternities and sororities and the basis of influences of student involvement with Greek letter organizations. Researchers found that involvement does increase retention rates but with a positive correlation to being involved in the Greek community. Researchers have also found that being involved in Greek-life raises the student GPA. A gap in the knowledge base of Greek-letter community involvement with the research problem in community membership and its effect on retention and GPA are topics that need further research.

Chapter III

Methodology

Context of Study

This study was conducted at the main campus of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. Rowan University is a public, 4-year research institution. Opening in 1923, Glassboro Normal School opened with 236 students. Then in 1937, Glassboro Normal School was renamed New Jersey State Teachers College at Glassboro. Years later in 1958, the school became known as Glassboro State College. In 1992, Henry and Betty Rowan donated \$100 million to this institution and the school became Rowan College. Finally reaching University status in 1997, the most updated name for this institution is now Rowan University (www.rowan.edu).

Rowan University's population consists of roughly 18,500 students, 15,500 undergraduates and 3,000 graduate students. Rowan currently has an attendance status of 81.8% full-time and 18.2% part-time. The student enrollment by gender 51% male and 49% female. The student enrollment by race: 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 5.8% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 10.3% Black, 9.5% Latino, 66% White, 2.5% Two or More Races, 4.5% Ethnicity Unknown, and 1.1% Non-Resident Alien (Forbes, 2018). Students can choose from 80 bachelor's degrees, 60 master's degrees, 5 doctoral programs, and 2 professional programs (www.rowan.edu).

Population

The target population of this study includes all active members Greek letter organizations at Rowan University during the spring 2019 semester. There are a total of

36 fraternities and sororities that are in good standing as of fall 2018. Membership numbers were provided by the Assistant Director of Greek Affairs at Rowan University. Students were asked the same questions with a survey

Instrumentation

The survey instrument, created on Qualtrics, used in this study asks students questions about their participation in their organization and how it benefited them academically and socially. Subjects are asked questions on a rating of strongly disagree to strongly agree about academic, social, and GPA satisfaction. There is another question asking about the recommendation of being a part of a Greek-letter organization at Rowan.

Data Collection Procedures

I talked to Gary Baker, the Assistant Director of Greek Affairs to get the emails of the students who are active members of the Greek-letter organizations. The students answered the Qualtrics survey, data was recorded using SPSS to construct the information collected from the survey.

Data Analysis

Once data is collected by the subjects, they was recorded electronically through Qualtrics and then downloaded into the SPSS computer software to calculate percentages, standard deviations, means, and frequencies from the questions asked. IRB approval gave me the opportunity to do research on Rowan University's Greek community.

Chapter IV

Findings

Profile of the Sample

The subjects in this study consisted of 90 active members of Greek Life at Rowan University during the Spring 2019 semester. The respondents were both male and female. The survey instrument was sent to the whole active Greek community which consisted of 1,185 students. However, 34 emails were not able to be delivered, leaving me with 1,151 students. Out of the 1,151 surveys sent out, only 99 were fully completed for a response rate of 9%. Out of the 99 returned 90 were fully completed. The other surveys were not used due to missing or incomplete information; this brought the usable response rate of the survey to 8%.

Analysis of the Data

Table 1 shows the demographics of the councils of the subjects who participated in this study. There were 45 National Panhellenic Conference sorority members (51%), 37 Interfraternity Council members (42%), 2 National Pan-Hellenic Council members (2%), and 4 Greek Cultural Organizations Council members (5%).

Table 1

Which council are you a part of?

Council	f	%
IFC	37	42
NPC	45	51
NPHC	2	2
GCOG	4	5

Research Question 3: Since becoming a member of a Greek-letter organization, is there a GPA increase?

Question 3 on the survey asked if there was a GPA increase since joining the Greek Community at Rowan University. Table 2 describes whether the Greek Community at Rowan University agreed that being a part of their organization affected their GPA. A majority of the results (31%) were found that the participants strongly agreed that their GPA did increase throughout their time in their organization with only 7% strongly disagreeing.

Table 2

Your GPA increased since being a part of Greek Life?

Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree Disagree		Somewhat nor		Strongly Disagree	
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
28	31	21	23	23	26	12	13	6	7

Research Question 2: In what ways, if any, did joining the organization provide motivation to return to Rowan University?

Question 4 of the survey asked if there were social benefits after joining your organization. Table 3 describes how the Greek Community at Rowan University provided social benefit for being a part of a Greek-letter organization. 82 participants strongly agreed that there were social benefits, 6 somewhat agreed, 2 neither agreed nor disagreed, and no one disagreed.

Table 3

There were social benefits of being a part of your Greek-letter organization?

Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
82	91	6	7	2	0	0	0	0	0

Question 5 of the survey asked if being in your Greek-letter organization helped you stay at Rowan University. Table 4 describes how the participants felt that being a part of a Greek-letter organization kept them to stay at Rowan University. 64 participants strongly agreed, 8 somewhat agreed, 14 neither agreed nor disagreed, 3 somewhat disagreed, and 1 strongly disagreed.

Table 4

Being a part of your Greek-letter organization, it helped you stay at Rowan University?

Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
64	71	8	9	14	16	3	3	1	1

Question 6 of the survey asked if you are happier since joining your Greek-letter organization. Table 5 describes if the participants felt happier joining their Greek-letter organization at Rowan University. 69 participants strongly agreed, 12 somewhat agreed, 4 neither agreed nor disagreed, 3 somewhat disagreed, and 1 strongly disagreed.

Table 5

You felt happier after joining your Greek-letter organization?

Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
69	78	12	13	4	5	3	3	1	1

Research question 1: Since becoming a member of a Greek-letter organization, did the membership make Rowan University more enjoyable?

Question 7 of the survey asked if you would tell a new student to join the Greek community at Rowan University. Table 6 describes the participants' attitude if they would tell a new student coming to Rowan if they should join a Greek-letter organization. 73 participants said they strongly agree, 12 said somewhat agree, 4 said neither agree nor disagree, 1 said somewhat disagree, and no one said strongly disagree.

Table 6

You would tell a new student to join a Greek-letter organization?

Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
73	81	12	13	4	5	1	1	0	0

Question 8 of the survey, which was open ended, asked the participants to describe their social or academic benefit of being a part of their Greek-letter organization. There were a lot of comments about how the participants felt a sense of belonging at the institution once they joined because they found their home away from home. The participants also felt that they have gained strong interpersonal relationships with each other and other members of the Greek community. The participants also felt that their GPA did increase due to the GPA requirement, it helped them gain time management skills to be able to participate in the Greek Community events.

One NPC member said

I was 100% against Greek Life my first semester at Rowan; but I was also miserable at Rowan my first semester. I wanted to branch out when I came to college but so many people from my high school go to this university, I felt like I was only talking to people I already knew. I ended up spending most of my time in my dorm, only talking to my roommates, and eating most meals alone. I was miserable. I went home every weekend and complained to my mom about how much I hated Rowan. I even started to fill out applications for other schools so I could transfer. During my second semester I overheard two girls in my class talking about how they were going out for recruitment. I had never imagined myself in a sorority, but I was desperate for new friends and to get involved. I ended up signing up an hour before the application closed and I walked over with a group of girls I went to high school with (they ended up either not going back the second day due to family commitments or were not eligible to participate). I went through the entire process alone. But as soon as I got my bid I had instant friends. I sat next to a girl who had the same name as me on bid day. During my new member meetings, I learned that I had classes with one of the girls, now she's my best friend and we drive hours to see each other over breaks. I have my current job because I applied and went to an interest meeting with another sister. Joining Greek life broke me out of my shell. I gained a new confidence and a new perspective on Greek Life. I have friends in different Greek organizations and even though we may be wearing different letters we are all grateful for everything

Greek life has given us. Greek life stopped me from transferring, gave me lifelong friends, and taught me how to love Rowan University.

Many of the students who answered the last question, said that they have found lifelong friends, people to study with to keep their GPAs high, more connections on campus, having motivation with the bonds of their sisterhood or brotherhood. Many felt that they were able to hold academic positions, be in honor societies, and felt a genuine desire to maintain that high GPA.

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

This study is based on a gap of knowledge on the effects of being a part of a Greek-letter organization on student success and GPA. The participants in this study were members of the Greek-letter community at Rowan University with two or more years of membership in their organization.

Quantitative data was collected from individuals who participated in the survey regarding the Greek-letter community at Rowan University. This data was analyzed using Qualtrics to explore similar themes in the responses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine that being a part of a Greek-letter organization was beneficial to retaining students, increasing their GPA, and if they were socially and academically satisfied at Rowan University. Survey research focused on the active members of the Greek community at Rowan University.

The number of Greek letter organizations recognized by higher education institutions creates a significant population that is important to study. With retention being a key factor in institutional ratings and ultimately contributing to degree attainment, it is a main focus for many colleges and universities (Hundrieser & Voigt,

2008). A sizeable portion of many campus' undergraduate populations may be fraternity or

sorority members. Most schools have a 15 to 20 percent Greek community study body, therefore, analyzing the retention rates of these students, and their thoughts about college persistence, would provide valuable information.

Data Analysis

All the participants agreed that being a member of their organization ~~it~~ allowed them to feel more at home at Rowan and made them want to remain enrolled in the institution. They were busy and always had something to do during the week and weekends besides going to class. There were many events such as community service, philanthropy, brotherhood/sisterhood, and chapter. Chapter is a weekly meeting that just goes over the week of events that have been planned for the organization.

Many felt that sense of belonging due to being with their brothers and sisters and having a common thing in mind. Many felt that they found a family who they could spend every day with making them feel happy that they are in their organization and being at Rowan. Many of the participants felt that their GPA increased or stayed the same. Only a few said that their GPA decreased. Many of the participants felt that being in their organization helped them have increased social skills, better networking opportunities and gained a huge support system from their brotherhood/sisterhood.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirmed Astin's theory of Student Involvement and how being involved can help a student feel like they belong at the institution. The Greek Life population felt the same about all the questions asked and all felt that being in the Greek-letter community at Rowan gave them the push to feel like they belong at Rowan and did not want to leave.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based upon my findings and conclusions, I recommend the following:

1. A longitudinal study of the impact of being a part of the Greek-letter community and how it affects retention.
2. A study should be conducted to focus on Greek-letter community membership and the connection to the institution.
3. Further research into Greek-letter community membership and sense of belonging at an institution.
4. Additional studies that explore other positive outcomes of membership in a Greek-letter organization.

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Appendix A (Survey Instrument)

Which council are you a part of?

- IFC
 - NPC
 - NPHC
 - GCOOC
-

There were academic benefits after joining your organization

- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-

Your GPA increased since being a part of the Greek Community

- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-

There were social benefits after joining your organization

- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-

Being in your Greek-letter organization helped you stay at Rowan University

- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-

You are happier since joining your Greek-letter organization

- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-

You would tell a new student to join the Greek community at Rowan

- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-

Describe your social/academic benefit for being a part of the Greek Community at Rowan University
