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Spring 2014 HEHD Research Forum

A qualitative research study on campus professionals' perceptions of the career development of sorority members

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored campus professionals' perceptions of sorority women's career development. The research was grounded in Super's Developmental Theory (1980). The sample population consisted of five campus professionals from a variety of backgrounds. Four overarching themes emerged: alignment of environment and values, connection between life cycle and collegiate membership, balancing multiple formal and informal roles, and impact of past experiences on future experiences. Implications related to support and reflection for members are offered.

Problem & Question

- explored the difference in the **educational gains** of fraternity/sorority members in comparison to non-members (Astin, 1984; Long & Snowden, 2011; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2009)
- examined the impact of membership on **career success** as it relates to **leadership** (Kelley, 2008)
- pressure on higher education to ensure students can meet demands of the **global work force** (Sparks & Waits, 2011, March)
- examining problem through the lens of what is occurring within the sorority environment could provide insight campus professionals can intentionally capitalize on in the future

How do fraternity/sorority campus professionals' understand the career development of sorority members?

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Findings

Alignment of Environment & Values - environment where students can attain certain work values, for example: achievement, altruism, creativity, social interaction, etc...

- *I think service is a value of hers. - Alpha*
- *When it comes to award recognition and things like that, they take pride in being able to say here are all the great things we're doing on campus - Beta*

Balancing Multiple Formal & Informal Roles - By chance and choice, students are balancing roles in different "theaters" (Super, 1980).

- *What are you gonna let go and what are you going to drop because you can't dedicate all of your time to these ten activities - Alpha*
- *In their residential community, they're an authority figure, and responsible for holding students accountable...They may see those exact some things happening in an off-campus context in their organization and don't have any authority - Gamma*
- *Seem to have this identity outside of their sorority experience - Epsilon*

Connection between Life Cycle and Membership - Membership reflected life cycle stages as growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline (Super, 1980).

- *Little bit of a slanted bell curve where you're starting out really small and narrow-focused and then it grows and expands - Beta*
- *As they get older, their connections tend to wane from that - I'm on fire for this organization - in that first year maybe two to I'm getting ready to graduate. I've got to get a job. - Delta*

Impact of Past Experiences on Future Experiences - Positive and negative experiences in formal and informal roles affect future collegiate and post-collegiate roles.

- *They're the least satisfied when they're not the ones that pursued that opportunity to be in a position - Alpha*
- *When they feel like they have the backing of the community and folks supporting them then that makes them more confident to seek out some of those roles of increasing responsibility. - Delta*

Participants

- Five female participants
- Varying undergraduate experiences
 - 2 NPC, 2 NPHC, 1 non-NPC
- Different institutions - not research site
- Joined as Freshman, Sophomore, & Junior
- Informal and formal roles
- Variety of advising/supervision levels

Methodology

- Semi-structured Interviews (Esterberg, 2002)
- Questions focused on:
 - Personal career development
 - Life cycle or journey of collegiate member
 - Informal and formal roles
 - Satisfaction or fulfillment in roles
 - Reconciling a change in roles
- Coding and sense making (Tesch, 1990)

Implications

To help equip students for their futures:

- Earlier education on formal and informal roles in chapter, council, and community
- Support for navigating the transitioning between formal and informal roles
- Encourage structured reflection through group or one-on-one advising to avoid a role consuming a student's identity
- Provide opportunities to help students articulate how this experience aligns with overall career development
- Collaborate to facilitate these opportunities

