Campus Professional’s Perceptions of the Career Development of Sorority Members

This qualitative study explored campus professionals’ perceptions of sorority women’s career development at a mid-sized public institution. The problem is the lack of research on how the sorority experience impacts a member’s career development. The researchers grounded the study in Super’s Developmental Theory (1980), which is focused on the idea of an individual’s roles in life over a lifetime or life span. Super’s life stages included: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, disengagement (1980).

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with five female campus professionals: 2 affiliated with National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), 2 affiliated with National Pan-hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC), and 1 affiliated with local sorority at her undergraduate institution. Participants came from different undergraduate and graduate institutions and affiliated at different points their collegiate years. Participants held formal and informal roles within their organizations and experienced a variety of advising or supervisory roles post-graduation. The researchers used descriptive coding to analyze the data and identified four themes: alignment of environment and values, connection between life cycle and membership, balancing multiple formal and informal roles, and impact of past experiences on future experiences. Membership provided an environment where students can attain certain work values outlined by Super (1980), for example: achievement, altruism, creative, and social interaction. Membership reflected life cycle stages as growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline (Super, 1980). Participants identified empowering, pivotal, or challenging times that helped students advance through these stages as well as reconciling who they and the rest of the members were in and outside of their organizations, chapters, or councils. The participants used the language of different life roles: mother, daughter, citizen, etc… (Super, 1980). Participants also noted how positive and negative experiences in formal and informal roles affect future collegiate and post-collegiate roles.

Student affairs practitioners can provide earlier education and support on how to transition between formal and informal roles within the chapter, council, and community. Providing structured reflection through group or one-on-one advising can be an intervention to avoid one role consuming a student’s identity. Career centers and offices of fraternity/sorority life can partner to organize opportunities to help students articulate how this experience aligns with overall career development. Ultimately, if members live out their self-concepts by maintaining and transitioning between life-roles while in college, they could apply this process to life post-college.